

MSP Community of Practice in the Mediterranean Action Plan (January 2025 – January 2027)

1. Background

The Community of Practice on Maritime Spatial Planning in the Mediterranean (MED-MSP-CoP) is a voluntary expert group from EU and non-EU countries working on MSP in the Mediterranean. Currently, the MED-MSP-CoP engages about 120 experts, from 15 Mediterranean countries, all countries involved in the WestMED Initiative (i.e. 5+5 Dialogue), and some international, EU and Mediterranean organisations.

The main objective of the MED-MSP-CoP is to establish a permanent communication and an effective and structured dialogue across borders between experts on MSP (i.e., planners, technical experts, and researchers) and related topics, aiming to:

- exchange knowledge and relevant experiences in the Mediterranean region
- share technical understanding on multiple aspects related to MSP
- reach a shared perspective on topics of common interest
- valorise and capitalise past, ongoing and upcoming projects and initiatives
- enhance the cooperation between the north and the south of the Mediterranean
- support the coherent uptake and implementation of MSP in the Mediterranean
- support national and international authorities responsible for MSP implementation.

In the past two years (January 2023 – January 2025), the MED-MSP-CoP focused its activity on two major topics:

- Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) in the Mediterranean, towards the targets set at the international and EU level on marine biodiversity protection. The analysis of this topic was narrowed down to the subtopic “Involvement of maritime sectors in environmental management”.
- MSP as a key enabler for implementing national Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE) strategies and initiatives, through adopting an integrated approach and towards the balanced distribution of benefits. The analysis of this topic was narrowed down to the subtopic “MSP as a strategic framework for SBE”.

A series of plenary [workshops](#) (seven in total) – involving all interested MED-MSP-CoP experts – led to identifying and discussing: (i) MSP projects and initiatives in the Mediterranean relevant for the selected subtopics; (ii) challenges affecting the full consideration of these subtopics in MSP; and (iii) possible solutions (knowledge, tools, methodological approaches, guidelines, case studies, good practices, among others) that scrutinised projects and initiatives can bring to the challenges characterising the two sub-topics. In addition, [webinars](#) were organised to disseminate and discuss concrete experiences and valuable practices developed around the Mediterranean on the two subtopics.

Based on the work performed, the MED-MSP-CoP experts identified a series of specific and strategic recommendations for its future work, which were discussed during the MED-MSP-CoP

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workshop organised in Madrid on January 29, 2025¹. Strategic recommendations can be summarised in the following points:

- Strengthen the pan-Mediterranean dimension of the MED-MSP-CoP, further enlarging the membership and participation of experts from eastern and southern Mediterranean countries.
- Structure the next work of the MED-MSP-CoP in working groups (WGs) to properly address specific MSP issues and aspects. Each WG should be coordinated by a chair or co-chairs, having the role of steering its activities. In addition, it is of pivotal importance to have transversal moments to put together and cross-fertilise the work of the different established groups, addressing common aspects.
- Continue the bottom-up approach to capitalising available projects, initiatives, and related valuable practices and lessons learned.
- Further strengthen the connection with the MED-MSP-CoP observers (UfM, UNEP-MAP WG, WestMED, EUSAIR, UNESCO-IOC MSPglobal, etc.).
- Enter into dialogue and exchange with CoP experiences developed in other EU sea basins and international contexts.
- Initiate a discussion on how the CoP could transfer its shared knowledge to national decision-makers, support national MSP processes to be coherent across borders and start the discussion on how to advance towards a common Mediterranean MSP.

In March 2025, MED-MSP-CoP's members were invited to participate in an online survey, aimed at gathering inputs on the next CoP's activities, in particular on: (i) confirmed participation in the MED-MSP-CoP (no participation, passive participation, proactive participation); (ii) participation and/or leadership in MED-MSP-CoP WGs; (iii) contribution to MED-MSP-CoP capitalisation webinars. The results of this survey inform this Action Plan.

The next activities of the MED-MSP-CoP are supported by the WestMED initiative and the MSP Assistance Mechanism. Some of them are also implemented in collaboration with the MEDIGREEN project, as detailed in the following pages. MEDIGREEN is an EMFAF-funded project started in November 2024 and ending in April 2027. The project has a pan-Mediterranean approach and aims to advance the European Green Deal (EGD) transition in the Mediterranean Sea through transnational cooperation in MSP. The project undertakes an operational approach and focuses on some key marine activities (either traditional or emerging), relevant to this sea basin: offshore renewable energy, fisheries, aquaculture and nature protection. MEDIGREEN intends to operationally support the MED-MSP-CoP and engage its experts in mutual learning on MSP at the Mediterranean.

¹ See the document: MED-MSP-CoP, 2024. Recommendations paper. This document results from the 2023-2024 joint work of MED-MSP-CoP members

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2. The Action Plan

This document outlines the third Action Plan of the MED-MSP-CoP, describing its activities for the period January 2025 – January 2027. The plan implements the recommendations discussed and agreed in the Madrid workshop and it is therefore based on the previous two years’ work of the MED-MSP-CoP.

Following these considerations, the Action Plan is organised by groups of activities (Figure 1):

- **Activities to support the operation and strengthening of the MED-MSP-CoP** (chapter 3)
- **Activities of the MED-MSP-CoP Working Groups** (chapter 4), developed in close collaboration with the MEDIGREEN project
- **Capitalisation actions** (chapter 5)
- **Networking and transferring actions** (chapter 6)

This Action Plan should be considered a dynamic document, which might be adapted and evolved based on the progressive implementation of its activities. Details of several activities (e.g. specific contents of the workshops) will be specified progressively.

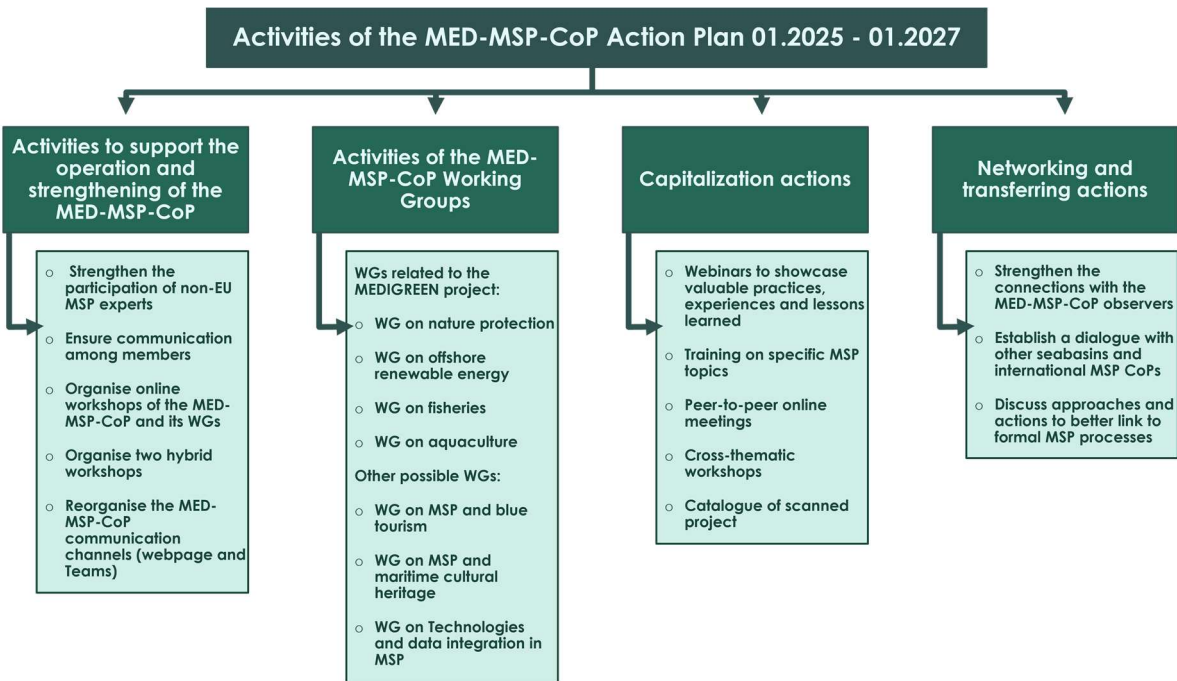


Figure 1. Summary of MED-MSP-CoP activities for the period 01.2025 – 01.2027

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3. Activities to support the operation and strengthening of the MED-MSP-CoP

Activities to support the operation and strengthening of the MED-MSP-CoP are provided by the MED-MSP-CoP core team and supported by the WestMED initiative and the MSP Assistance Mechanism. They are also implemented in collaboration with the MEDIGREEN project. These activities include:

- Keeping the list of MED-MSP-CoP members updated
- Ensuring communication to and among the MED-MSP-CoP members
- Organising online workshops of the MED-MSP-CoP and its WGs
- Supporting the organisation of two hybrid workshops of the MED-MSP-CoP
- Organising capitalisation events of the MED-MSP-CoP
- Organising the MED-MSP-CoP Teams (one for all members and a second for the MED-MSP-CoP core team) and keeping their contents updated
- Organise and update the MED-MSP-CoP webpage hosted by the EU MSP Platform.

The MED-MSP-CoP currently includes a wide and diversified pool of experts. An extended and strengthened participation of experts and practitioners from eastern and southern Mediterranean countries has been remarked as crucial to enlarge the CoP and try to capture the full diversity of the different Mediterranean contexts. To support this process, the MED-MSP-CoP will **identify and invite additional MSP experts** to take part in the next workshops and dissemination events.

4. Activities of the MED-MSP-CoP Working Groups

As agreed in the January 2025 Madrid workshop, next MED-MSP-CoP technical and scientific activities will be implemented through WGs. **Four WGs have been established under MEDIGREEN project** and will be activated in April 2025 to discuss the role of MSP in supporting the sustainable development of offshore renewable energy, fisheries, aquaculture, and nature protection. The results of the March 2025 survey confirmed the interest of the CoP members in these WGs. Based on such a survey, chairs of the WGs will be identified in April 2025. The work of these WGs will contribute to some of the MEDIGREEN activities, in particular providing input to four technical studies on the role of MSP in supporting the EGD-driven transition of offshore renewable energy, fisheries, aquaculture and nature protection.

The Madrid workshop and the survey also collected experts' suggestions about the possible activation of additional WGs, namely:

- MSP and blue tourism
- MSP and maritime cultural heritage
- Technologies and data integration in MSP

In the following months the MED-MSP-CoP will assess the interest (e.g. through dedicated webinars) of its members in the first and second **additional WGs** to then discuss their possible

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activation or the integration of some of the related themes in the already established working groups. For the third topic, the feasibility and modalities of improving the link between the MED-MSP-CoP and the Technical Expert Group (TEG) on Data for MSP will be evaluated and again discussed with interested experts.

MED-MSP-CoP WGs will work through online and hybrid workshops. A part of the first event already held in January 2025, all other workshops will combine a plenary session on cross-cutting issues with breakout sessions focusing on WGs' topics. The tentative structure of these **workshops** is outlined below; this will be adapted based on the evolving work of the different WGs. Four events are planned for 2025:

- MED-MSP-CoP 1-day hybrid workshop, January 2025, Madrid (Spain). The workshop, organised back-to-back with the MEDIGREEN opening conference, discussed the outcome of the previous two years' activities, discussed and finalised the strategic and specific recommendations for the next activities of the MED-MSP-CoP, and agreed on the way the CoP will contribute to the MEDIGREEN project.
- MED-MSP-CoP online workshop, May 2025. The workshop will set the scene and co-define the scope of work of the MED-MSP-CoP WGs. The March 2025 survey gathered preliminary input on issues to be considered by the WGs, which are summarised in Annex 1. They are quite heterogeneous and will be used to initiate the discussion. The commented layout of the MEDIGREEN technical studies will be presented and discussed in this workshop to identify which specific aspects the MED-MSP-CoP WGs can contribute to. WGs are not expected to work in isolation; the workshop will also be used to identify common traversal issues (e.g. data, governance aspects, etc.) which should be discussed during this and next workshops at the plenary level.
- MED-MSP-CoP online workshop, September/October 2025. Each WG will identify available knowledge and sources of information for the considered topics of interest and discuss the way they can contribute to the MEDIGREEN technical studies. Such sources of information include projects, case studies, pilot actions, scientific papers, reports, formal MSP initiatives, etc. The workshop will also analyse major persisting gaps.
- 2-day hybrid workshop, November/December 2025, Tunisia. This workshop will be organised by MEDIGREEN and will combine: (i) a MEDIGREEN capitalisation workshop to disseminate and discuss ongoing results of the project, identify MSP needs and priorities related to the EGD in non-EU countries, identify possible recommendations for improving the integration of the EGD in spatial planning and management; (ii) MED-MSP-CoP workshop to share experiences and practices on MSP support to the EGD-driven transition of the considered marine uses. The workshop will also discuss preliminary results of MEDIGREEN Task 3.2 analysis and provide input to Task 3.2 technical studies (e.g. on current status and trends of the considered uses, governance aspects, conflicts and synergies, climate change implications, etc.).

2026 activities will also be organised around four MED-MSP-CoP events:

- MED-MSP-CoP online workshop, February-March 2026. This event will be dedicated to showcasing experiences and valuable practices on the way MSP can support the

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sustainable development of considered marine uses. The discussion will highlight commonalities and differences and identify barriers, future challenges, and enablers.

- MED-MSP-CoP online or hybrid workshop (the possibility to organise this workshop during the EMD event in Cyprus will be investigated), May-June 2026. This event will be entirely dedicated to the discussion of the draft MEDIGREEN studies. The four studies will be presented, and MED-MSP-CoP members will be engaged in a structured discussion to provide feedback for their finalisation. Gathered comments and inputs will then be integrated by MEDIGREEN partners in the final version of the studies.
- MED-MSP-CoP online workshop, September 2026. MED-MSP-CoP members will continue the discussion, focusing on possible recommendations. In addition, participants will be engaged by the MEDIGREEN project to discuss and agree on the scope, structure and preliminary contents of four MED-MSP-CoP position papers summarising the work of the WGs that this project has to deliver.
- 2-day hybrid workshop, December 2026, Eastern Mediterranean country to be confirmed. This workshop will be organised by MEDIGREEN and will combine: (i) a MEDIGREEN capitalisation workshop to disseminate and discuss ongoing results of the project, identify MSP needs and priorities related to the EGD in non-EU countries, identify possible recommendations for improving the integration of the EGD in spatial planning and management; (ii) MED-MSP-CoP workshop to share experiences and practices on MSP support to the EGD-driven transition of the considered marine uses, present and disseminate final versions of MEDIGREEN technical papers, advance in the definition of contents (recommendations in particular) of the MED-MSP-CoP position papers.

For each workshop, WG chairs, supported by the technical secretariat, will prepare a common agenda, define the dynamic component of the workshops and prepare a final note on the outcome and follow-up actions. Co-chairs are also responsible for the organisation and steering of the technical work to be completed between the two workshops.

5. Capitalisation actions

Dissemination and capitalisation are among the key objectives of the MED-MSP-CoP and will continue in the future. Based on past years' experience, the CoP will continue its series of one-hour **webinars** to showcase valuable practices, experiences and lessons learned and open the floor to discussion around topics of interest for the MED-MSP-CoP and its WGs. Annex 2 provides an overview of preliminary topics identified by the March 2025 survey. Based on the effective demand of MED-MSP-CoP members, the following activities could also be organised:

- **Training** on specific MSP topics (e.g. MSP data, methodological approach, cumulative impact assessment, conflict analysis, scenario building, models and tools for MSP, etc.). These events could be, for example, organised back-to-back with the MED-MSP-CoP hybrid workshops.
- **Peer-to-peer online meetings**, involving a restricted number of participants who meet to share experiences and opinions on specific and concrete MSP-related issues.

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- **Cross-thematic workshops**, to address transversal topics across the MED-MSP-CoP working groups.

Previous MED-MSP-CoP activities included a throughout mapping of MSP projects and initiatives in the Mediterranean. This will be transformed into a **catalogue** reporting the main information for each mapped element, to be possibly published on the MED-MSP-CoP webpages hosted by the EU MSP Platform.

6. Networking and transferring actions

The connections with the MED-MSP-CoP observers will be strengthened. Observers will be invited to join the major MED-MSP-CoP events (as in particular the two hybrid workshops, webinars, etc.) organised by the CoP. In addition, the MED-MSP-CoP will continue mapping the events on MSP and related topics (e.g. sustainable blue economy, marine conservation, etc.) organised by the observers and benefit from them to disseminate MED-MSP-CoP activities and their outcomes. At the same time, these events should be an opportunity for the MED-MSP-CoP to collect needs and expectations, as well as to organise back-to-back events, as occurred in June 2023 for the WestMED Annual Stakeholder Conference held in Malta. The MED-MSP-CoP will reinforce the dialogue with the UNEP-MAP Working Group on MSP to operationalise the collaboration on specific activities, as the co-organisation of training and capacity building events.

CoP's experiences are flourishing in other sea basins (e.g. in the Atlantic) and international contexts. The MED-MSP-CoP will enter into dialogue and exchange with these initiatives for cross-fertilisation (on objectives, approaches, methodologies and contents). The parallel implementation of the two siblings MEDIGREEN and NESBp (in the North and Baltic seas) projects offers a great opportunity in this sense. At the same time, strengthening the collaboration with the IOC-UNESCO MSPglobal Forum will provide the opportunity to link to a worldwide experience.

The MED-MSP-CoP aims to reach a shared technical perspective on topics of common interest. The co-developed knowledge is ultimately meant to feed the international and European MSP-related initiatives, through the observers, and the national MSP processes. This latter aspect has been marginally addressed till now. The MED-MSP-CoP will organise a dedicated **online brainstorming event** (early 2026) to identify operational modalities (e.g. dedicated workshops back-to-back with events and meetings organised in the frame of formal MSP processes, informal meetings, briefs, etc.) to fulfil this scope.

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7. Timetable

The following figure shows the overall timetable of the Action Plan’s activities.

	2025												2026												2027
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Ago	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Ago	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
Supporting the operation and stenghtening of the MED-MSP-CoP																									
Establishing the MED-MSP-CoP WG																									
MED-MSP-CoP workshops (H = hybrid mode; L = on-line mode)	H				L				L		H		L			L				L			H		
MED-MSP-CoP WGs' contribution to MEDIGREEN technical papers																									
Elaboration of MED-MSP-CoP WG's position papers with MEDIGREEN support																									
Webinar, training, etc.																									
Catalogue of MSP projects and initiatives																									
Networking and transferring actions																									
Online event on transferring actions																									

Annex 1 – preliminary input on issues to be considered by the WGs as identified by the March 2025 MED-MSP-CoP survey

Cross-cutting	Conflicts among uses, including competition for space Synergies among uses Multi-use and co-location in the same space Balancing national energy/aquaculture goals with marine conservation commitments The way MSP can tackle licensing issues affecting the sustainable blue economy The way MSP can facilitate the integration of the ecosystem approach in maritime economic activities Data collection and sharing for the assessment of cumulative human impacts on the ecosystems Climate change impacts on marine uses Research-society bidirectional dialogue Transboundary implementation of MSP
Offshore renewable energy (ORE)	Suitability maps for ORE Knowledge on ORE impacts on the marine environment and conflict with other uses, and its uptake in policy formulation and implementation The role of MSP in advancing ORE and meeting the EU objectives (GW) Coexistence, regulatory and governance challenges Co-location, co-existence and multi-use, in particular regarding nature protection Synergy opportunities between shipping and ORE sectors Regulatory framework for facilitating a just, sustainable and effective deployment of ORE Transboundary planning for ORE Cost-benefit analysis throughout the life cycle of renewable energy devices

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Fisheries	Improving fisheries and ecological data (including stock assessment and socio-economic aspects) collection and availability, in particular in the southern Mediterranean Supporting the sustainability of fisheries and facilitating the implementation of fisheries management policies through ecosystem-based MSP Improving the dialogue between MSP practitioners and fisheries stakeholders at regional, sub-regional and local scales. MSP-related initiatives supporting small-scale fisheries (dialogue, knowledge exchange, synergies with marine conservation, etc.). Extension and management of Fisheries Restricted Areas Co-management of fisheries, in particular within MPAs The way MSP can contribute to combat Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, particularly in sensitive Mediterranean ecosystems MSP support for innovation in low-impact fishing techniques Climate change and fisheries: impacts, adaptation and mitigation Marine governance and policy coordination to improve the sustainability of the sector
Aquaculture	Proper allocation of space for aquaculture through MSP Interactions between aquaculture and marine conservation Sustainable site selection to minimise ecological disruption Multi-use Energy transition in aquaculture Improving adaptation to climate change Strengthening the engagement of aquaculture stakeholders in MSP

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Nature protection	Data availability and data gaps for improved nature protection Implementing ecosystem-based management strategies that support the EGD objectives Strengthening the integration of MPAs, MPA connectivity and ecological corridors in MSP Better designation of MPAs and other protection measures (including OECM) Working with the maritime sectors on OECM designation and management The role of MSP in meeting the EU objectives on biodiversity protection (including 10% of strict protection) and nature restoration. Moving from paper MPAs to implemented protection The role of MSP in supporting the sustainable management of maritime uses outside protected areas and avoiding the intensification of pressures and impacts Integrating the human/social dimension in nature protection Developing/implementing social criteria to assess the multiple values (e.g. relational values), belief systems and perceptions of stakeholders using and benefiting from nature Reinforcing the effective role of strategic environmental assessment in MSP Assessing cumulative impacts of multiple sectoral activities in shared marine spaces The importance of standardised methods for biodiversity assessment and improved data accessibility across the Mediterranean for MSP Integrating climate change in nature protection in terms of expected impacts (on habitats and species) and protection needs. Using climate change impact modelling in MSP Cross-border and transboundary MSP for nature protection
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Annex 2 – preliminary topics identified by the March 2025 survey for MED-MSP-CoP webinars

Possible Topics
MSP and aquaculture: - Managing aquaculture conflicts with other uses - Fostering synergies between aquaculture and other uses (ORE in particular) - Integrating Allocated Zone for Aquaculture (AZA) plans in MSP
MSP and small-scale fisheries: - Data on small-scale fisheries - Managing conflicts between small-scale fisheries and other uses - Fostering synergies between small-scale fisheries and other uses - Increasing awareness among small-scale fishermen on marine ecosystem protection - Engaging small-scale fishermen in the co-management of natural resources
MSP and fisheries - Fishery management plans and MSP - Improving the engagement of fishery stakeholders in MSP - Managing intra-fishery conflicts
MPAs in MSP - MPAs as tools for MSP implementation - MSP as a tool for MPA identification - The role of MPAs in improved management of marine resources and the positive socio-economic effects on local communities - MPA connectivity - Trades off and synergies with other sectors
Area-Based Management Tools (ABMT) - How to use ABMT for nature protection and how to integrate them in MSP - ABMT and OECM - How to consider areas identified as particularly important for biodiversity (e.g. EBSA, IMMA, CCH, IBA, ISRA, etc) in MSP
Scenario building for offshore renewable energy development
Multi-use possibilities for the development of emerging sectors (i.e. ORE and aquaculture)

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MSP and Blue Tourism
MSP and Marine and Underwater Cultural Heritage
Marine green infrastructure and nature-based solutions in MSP, including their role in coastal protection and marine ecosystem restoration
Data and tools for MSP - Technologies and data applications for MSP - Major gaps in MSP data in the Mediterranean - Integrating MSP data and plans in EMODNET
Participatory planning and community engagement in MSP, and mobilising local knowledge for MSP
Transboundary MSP from a regional sea perspective
Linking scientific standards with policymaking decisions; applying soft law in cases of legal gaps
Evaluating and integrating ecosystem services in MSP
Managing human impacts to achieve seafloor integrity
Climate change and MSP, including the use of operational tools
The legacy of the MSP4BIO project for MED-MSP-CoP and MEDIGREEN (e.g. decision-support tools, factsheets on nature-inclusive design of sectors, policy solutions)