



Regional training (webinars):
Phasing out single use plastic items in the Mediterranean
January-February 2021
(Activity No: RE-1-REG)

Concept note



1 INTRODUCTION: THE WES PROJECT

The "Water and Environment Support (WES) in the ENI Neighborhood South Region" project is a regional technical support project funded by the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI South). WES aims to protect the natural resources in the Mediterranean context and to improve the management of scarce water resources in the region. WES mainly aims to solve the problems linked to pollution prevention and the rational use of water.

WES builds on previous similar regional projects funded by the European Union (Horizon 2020 CB/MEP, SWIM I and II, SWIM-Horizon 2020 SM) strives to create a supportive environment and increase the capacity of all stakeholders in the partner countries (PCs).

The WES Partner Countries are Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Libya, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia. However, in order to ensure the coherence and effectiveness of EU funding or to promote regional cooperation, the eligibility of specific actions can be extended to neighboring countries in the Southern Neighborhood region.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Plastics have become the basic component for manufacturing numerous everyday products, and since the 1950s, their production has consistently grown, with their global production reaching 322 million tons in 2015 and expected to double by 2035. The durability of plastics and their potential for diverse applications, including widespread use as disposable items, were anticipated, but the problems associated with waste management and plastic waste were not. In 2015 it was estimated that approximately 6,300 million tons of plastic waste had been generated, around 9% of which had been recycled, 12% incinerated, and 79% accumulated in landfills or the natural environment.¹

Plastic pollution is recognized as one of the major pollution problems of our times that damages the environmental, economic and cultural values of the natural environment. In particular, the issue of marine plastic pollution has gained increasing attention in the last decades and has been characterized as the new millennium's tragedy of the commons, as it poses a complex and multi-dimensional challenge with significant implications for the marine and coastal environment and human livelihoods all over the world.

Single-use plastics (SUPs) refer to products that are made wholly or partly from plastic and that are not conceived, designed or placed on the market to accomplish, within their life span, multiple trips or rotations by being returned to a producer for refill or re-used for the same purpose for which they were conceived. SUPs commonly include plastic bags, cutlery, straws and stirrers, food and beverage containers, packaging, cups and cup lids, cotton bud sticks, wet wipes, balloons, etc.

¹ Geyer, R., Jambeck, J.R., Law, K.L., 2017. Production, use, and fate of all plastics ever made. *Science Advances* 3 (7), 1700782. <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.1700782>

According to UNEP’s report entitled “SINGLE-USE PLASTICS: A Roadmap for Sustainability”², nearly 50% of the plastic waste generated globally in 2015 was plastic packaging. Plastic packaging is one of the most common SUPs found in the environment, including the marine environment. Indicatively, in European Regional Seas, SUPs represented 50% of the total marine litter items found on beaches in 2016.³ A recent study carried out in the Mediterranean coastline, reported that SUPs accounted for 38% of all items recorded, ranging from 18.6% to 66.9% for the different beaches, while 30% of the investigated beaches had more than 50% of SUPs of the total items recorded.⁴

2.2 REGIONAL CONTEXT

The facts presented above call for action on Single-Use Plastics in the Mediterranean region, and in line with the global policy agenda. UNEA4 held in May 2019 adopted a specific resolution on Addressing Single-Use Plastic Products Pollution (UNEP/EA.4/L.10).

The Single-Use Plastics Directive (Directive on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment) entered into force on 2 July 2019. The Directive aims to tackle pollution from single-use plastics (and fishing gear), as the items most commonly found on European beaches and seas. It urges a transition away from single-use plastics, towards reusable products and systems addressing single-use plastic items through a range of policy measures. These measures include market restrictions, consumption reduction, design, collection and labelling requirements and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes, depending on the type of item and on already available alternatives. The Directive applies to single-use items made of plastic, including bio-based and biodegradable plastics, in other words, regardless of whether they are derived from biomass or are intended to biodegrade over time. The EU foresees the ban of 15 items listed as per July 2021, as well as a significant consumption reduction for food containers and beverage cups, offering the opportunity to scale-up reusable plastic alternatives rather than simply switching to single-use products made of another material.

Significant actions have been taken to support non-EU Mediterranean countries to minimize plastic waste and marine plastic pollution, as the almost entirely enclosed Mediterranean basin is considered to be one of the most affected by and vulnerable to marine litter areas world-wide, and the need to implement mitigation measures across the entire basin is urgent, requiring a harmonized or at least commonly agreed approach and intensified efforts from all countries.

The ambitious European Green Deal “a growth strategy for the EU aims to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive carbon neutral economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use”⁵. The European Commission linked the Green Deal with the “Leaving no

² UNEP, 2018. SINGLE-USE PLASTICS: A Roadmap for Sustainability.

<https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/report/single-use-plastics-roadmap-sustainability>

³ Addamo, A.M., Laroche, P., Hanke, G., 2017. Top Marine Beach Litter Items in Europe. EUR 29249 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2017, ISBN 978-92-79-87711-7, JRC108181.

⁴ Vlachogianni, Th, Skocir, M., Constantin, P., Labbe, C., Orthodoxou, D., Pematzoglou, I., Scannella, D., Spika, M., Zissimopoulos, V., Scoullou, M., 2019. Plastic Pollution on the Mediterranean Coastline: Generating Fit-For-Purpose Data to Support Decision-Making via a Participatory-Science Initiative. Science of the Total Environment, p. 13505

⁵ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - The European Green Deal- 11.12.2019

one behind” principle and will support the EU Neighbourhood to go towards a transition to a fair and prosperous society based on green and sustainable economy.

The UfM Environment Agenda, guided by the 2014 UfM Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Climate Change, but also currently in the phase of developing its 2021-2030 Environment Agenda (a second UfM Ministerial Meeting on Environment and Climate Change is planned for 2021 where a new Ministerial Declaration is expected to be endorsed for the next decade), green economy, SCP, solid waste management and abatement of marine litter are integral components supported by many projects (including EU regional projects such as WES, Marine Litter Med, SwitchMed, IMAP-MPA), while the preparatory documents with the elements of the upcoming Declaration include circular economy, minimization of plastics and marine litter among the priority themes.

Under the Barcelona Convention, during the last biennium, UNEP/MAP has focused on addressing the issue of single-use plastic bags, while the UNEP/MAP Programme of Work (PoW) 2020-2021 adopted at COP21 (December 2019, Naples)⁶ includes support to the Contracting Parties for the implementation of circular economy measures in the packaging sector and the development of specific **Regional Guidelines on measures to phase out Single-Use Plastic items**, based on a baseline situation study, assessing the current status in the different countries.

In line with all of the above, many governments and stakeholders in the region are already making progress towards tackling SUPs. This WES regional training, comes to support and complement the above-mentioned regional efforts, and support the WES Partner Countries in their efforts to phase out single use plastic items.

2.3 TARGET GROUP

From each of the WES Partner Countries, the following five (5) persons are expected to participate:

- 2 policy persons from the Ministry of Environment (dealing with plastics regulation) (ideally these persons should coincide with the Peers appointed for the Peer-to-Peer process)
- 1 policy person from the Ministry of Industry (dealing with the plastics industry)
- 1 person from the productive sector (plastics producers, relevant association) or academia
- 1 CSO representative (environmental NGO, consumers’ association, women’s group, youth group, ...). This trainee can be identified in collaboration with SwitchMed and the Bluegreen project and its network.

From the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Turkey) two (2) persons per country are expected to participate:

⁶ Naples, December 2019, COP21, countries recognized “the urgency to prevent and significantly reduce plastic leakage in the Mediterranean Sea by 2025 with clear commitments to reduce plastic consumption, support eco-design and innovation, resource efficiency and effectively improved waste management, as well as enhanced control and prevention measures such as bans, incentives, taxes and extended producer responsibility schemes” and decided among other actions “to scale - up efforts to address the issue of marine litter by empowering the regulatory framework for reducing single-use plastic products, setting ambitious quantitative targets, and incorporating reduction measures including on microplastics in (...) the national marine litter agenda, and to undertake the following actions: promote prevention measures and circular approaches also to open green economy opportunities; supporting long-term viable recycling targets; adopting national plans to progressively achieve 100% plastic waste collection and recycling by 2025; and addressing the private sector to minimize plastic packaging.”

- 1 policy person from the Ministry of Environment (dealing with plastics regulation)
- 1 person from the productive sector (plastics producers, industry association, ...), academia or CSO

3 OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED RESULTS

3.1 OBJECTIVES

The overall aim of the regional training is to strengthen the skills and capacities of the participants to identify, prioritize and operationalize targeted measures to phase out Single-Use Plastics (SUPs). In particular, the training will enhance their competences, among others, in terms of:

- Technical aspects of SUPs (definitions, types, pathways, impact, etc.)
- Analysis of baseline situation: production, consumption, leakage of SUPs into the environment, etc.
- Identification of SUPs of concern in each country
- Pros/cons of alternatives to SUPs
- Policy options to reduce and better manage SUPs
- Impact assessment of policy options
- Policy and decision-making based on sound scientific evidence

In addition, and in line with the parallel WES Peer-to-Peer process, the following objectives are pursued:

- Sharing knowledge on challenges related to SUPs
- Sharing expertise on solutions to manage and reduce SUPs
- Boosting south-to-south and north-to-south cooperation
- Building lasting relations and exchanges

Finally, the regional training will contribute to the development of the *Regional Guidelines on measures to phase out Single-Use Plastic items*, that will eventually be adopted by the Barcelona Convention at the next Meeting of the Contracting Parties in 2021.

3.2 APPROACH TO MEET OBJECTIVES

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the initial proposal of a 3-day regional training in Barcelona has been changed to a series of four on-line webinars of two hours each. They cover the entire management cycle of SUPs: from the assessment of the current situation to the implementation and monitoring of measures.

The structure and content of the program is tailored in consultation with the WES Partner Countries participating in the Peer-to-Peer process linked to this regional activity.

The webinars will use a virtual platform that will allow for live interaction with and among participants, including break-out groups. During the webinars, presentations will be made by WES experts,

stakeholders from the WES Partner Countries, invited speakers, etc. Pre- and post-exercises will be utilized to enhance the learning experience, while useful learning material and other resources will be provided.

The content of the webinars will follow the below lines:

Webinar 1. The problematic of single-use plastics

This first webinar will introduce the basic terms and definitions related to SUPs. It will focus on why they have become a problem. It will provide key facts and figures related to their production and consumption, as well as their leakage into the environment. Particular attention will be given to SUPs ending up in the coastal and marine environment. An overview of the amounts, types, pathways, sources and potential impacts of marine plastic pollution in the Mediterranean and its biota will be provided. In addition, the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic will be addressed in relation to the increased use of SUPs and personal protective equipment (masks, gloves, hand sanitizers). Popular misconceptions related to safety and alternatives to SUPs will also be discussed.

Webinar 2. Responses to single-use plastics

Responses to SUPs strongly depend on the need for and availability of sound alternatives. Hence, the second session will start by depicting and discussing the alternatives to SUPs, including single-use non-plastic (SUNP) options and multi-use options. The basics of the life-cycle assessment method for appraising the environmental impact of a product will be included in this module. Terms such as bio-based, biodegradable and compostable plastics will be clarified to avoid popular misconceptions on their degradability and end of life management.

Next in this module, policy measures to address SUPs will be explored, including their potential effectiveness and/or feasibility. Among these will be economic or market-based policy instruments (e.g. taxes and tariffs), voluntary agreements by the private sector and other practices.

Last but not least, the status of adoption of SUPs-related measures in some of the Mediterranean countries will be presented, including challenges in enforcement and implementation.

Webinar 3. Feasibility and impact of measures in the Mediterranean

As already mentioned, within the Barcelona Convention, a process to develop *Regional Guidelines on measures to phase out Single-Use Plastic items* is ongoing. This process includes the elaboration of a SUPs baseline situation report in the Mediterranean, which features the SUPs baseline situation in four Mediterranean countries. These will be used as case studies during this webinar.

The participants will be introduced to the methodology to be followed in order to assess the baseline situation in a country in terms of SUPs production, consumption, waste management practices, and leakage into the environment. They will explore how this may lead to defining appropriate policy measures and the potential impact that these policy measures would have in a given context.

Webinar 4. Towards regional guidelines

Whereas the previous session will focus on the steps leading to the adoption of a particular policy measure, in this last webinar the implementation modalities/requirements for those measures will be explored, together with measures that create the enabling environment (e.g. governance issues,

incentives to industry, monitoring, etc.). Trainees will be informed about the *Regional Guidelines on measures to phase out Single-Use Plastic items* that are underway under the Barcelona Convention system.

3.3 EXPECTED OUTCOMES

By participating in the webinars policy makers and other stakeholders from the business sector and civil society will:

- Gain deepened knowledge on the challenges posed by SUPs, particularly related to their leakage in the coastal and marine environment.
- Obtain an understanding of the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to SUPs.
- Get a clear understanding of pros and cons of alternatives to SUPs.
- Learn about various measures to reduce and better manage SUPs.
- Gain knowledge on the current status of responses to SUPs in the WES Partner Counties.
- Have enhanced capacity to assess the baseline situation on SUPs and the impact of various policy measures opted for.
- Have enhanced capacity to implement SUPs policy measures, and monitor progress.
- Contribute to the ongoing development of the *Regional Guidelines on measures to phase out Single-Use Plastic items* under the Barcelona Convention process.
- Reinforce a regional network of stakeholders dealing with SUPs in the Mediterranean.

4 LEARNING PLATFORM, TIME AND LOGISTICS

The on-line training will consist of **4 consecutive 2-hour webinars** spreading over 2 months as follows:

Webinar Module 1: 13th January | The problematic of single-use plastics

Webinar Module 2: 28th January | Responses to single-use plastics

Webinar Module 3: 11th February | Feasibility and impact of measures in the Mediterranean

Webinar Module 4: 25th February | Towards regional guidelines

Further details on the platform to be used, agenda, support materials, etc. will be sent directly to the selected trainees.