



WES newsletter

Water and Environment Support (WES) project

The “Water and Environment Support (WES) in the ENI Southern Neighbourhood Region” is a regional project funded by the European Union. It aims at protecting the environment and improving the management of scarce water resources in the Mediterranean region. Among the key objectives of WES is to tackle problems related to pollution prevention and water use efficiency. WES capitalises on the experience of previous successful EU funded projects (Horizon 2020 CB/MEP 2010-2014, SWIM SM, SWIM and Horizon 2020, 2015-2019) strives for creating the enabling environment and increasing the relevant capacities of all stakeholders in the partner countries.

WES supports the shift to a more sustainable consumption and production model, promotes an integrated and efficient management of water, combats plastic pollution and marine litter and fosters dialogue on key environmental and sustainable development issues. It operates as a support mechanism to the Partner Countries, creating synergies and opportunities for collaboration and dissemination of information and good practices. WES also provides support to its institutional partners, namely the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) by facilitating specific regional strategies and dialogues and the UN Environment/Mediterranean Action Plan of the Barcelona Convention.

The WES Partner Countries are Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Libya, Palestine¹ and Tunisia.

¹ This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of Member States on this issue.

Hopes for 2021

Entering 2021, still with severe problems worldwide and in the Mediterranean area because of the COVID-19 Pandemic, we should not forget that this is a “watershed” year starting a critical decade towards 2030 and linked to the expectations raised by the Agenda 2030 and the hopes for the achievement of the SDGs.

COVID-19 has a double, controversial impact on the progress of the Environmental and Sustainable Development efforts. On the one hand, it has damaged the economy and therefore it has reduced the availability of funds for the necessary investments related to the achievement of the SDGs. On the other, it has confirmed and made clear to decision makers and the wide public that the complex health, environmental and social problems of our days are global in nature, they become more and more “existential”, important for the very survival of humankind on this planet and therefore they need to be addressed urgently, thoroughly and simultaneously at many levels, from global to local.

In this respect, the political changes in the United States of America may contribute to the enhancement of the international cooperation in addressing Climate Change, while it is hoped that the upcoming series of major international/global conferences will stimulate and strengthen coordination of joint efforts among States and with non-State stakeholders. Among the very significant International Conferences of global scope are COP 26 on Climate Change in Glasgow, COP 15 on Biological Biodiversity in China and

the UNESCO Conference on Education for Sustainable Development in Berlin, as well as the Mediterranean Regional UfM Ministerial Conference on Environment and Climate Action, in Egypt, and a series of other regional meetings such as the Mediterranean Water Forum to take place in Malta in 2021 as preparation for the World Water Forum in Dakar, Senegal in 2022.

The WES project has been designed taking the international environment and development priorities into account and aims at contributing in these areas and facilitating the WES Partner Countries and the EU to have available for these fora tangible examples of their efforts and experiences resulting from the implementation of relevant WES activities. Single-Use Plastics (SUPs), for instance, are included in the agendas

of all the aforementioned international conferences. Similarly, central to all, are Nature Based Solutions (NBSs) related to water retention and detention systems, recharging aquifers, increasing water availability for ecosystems and reducing flood risks, among others.

What is important to consider and enhance also through the advancement of the Communication Strategy within the framework of the WES project is the systematic link of the WES activities to the reports of the countries and the EU to the aforementioned fora.

Michael Scoullos,
WES Team Leader Professor

WES Workplan 2021 approved by Steering Committee

The WES workplan for the coming 12 months was endorsed during the second WES Steering Committee Meeting (SCM). The meeting, which was held on-line on 23 November 2020, focused on stocktaking of the project's achievements so far and presented the activities that are planned for the next year 2020-2021.

The meeting was co-chaired by the WES programme manager, Ms Sylvie Fontaine of the Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) who welcomed the participants and highlighted the importance of the project within the wider EU efforts for the environment and circular economy.

Mr. Stefano Dotto, Head of Sector Connectivity, Climate and Environment from the Contracting Authority- the European Commission DG NEAR addressed the meeting by highlighting the continuous efforts of the EU to support sustainable development, tackle issues of climate change and to protecting the environment and the important role that the WES project is playing in achieving this.

Mr. Patrick Wegerdt of DG ENV made a link of the WES project to the EU "Green Deal".

Ms Alessandra Sensi of UfM referred to the upcoming second Ministerial Meeting on Environment and Climate Action and to the support WES is providing to the UfM relevant agendas while Ms Tatiana Hema of UNEP/MAP congratulated the WES team and referred to mutual support in enhancing the impact of WES and UNEP activities on similar issues.

WES Team Leader Professor Michael Scoullos, accentuated that during the past few months WES made a great effort to adapt the activities to the COVID-19 reality, he presented the progress of both components at national and regional level and emphasized that moving together towards a more sustainable Mediterranean is more important than ever.

All countries represented by both their Environmental and Water Focal Points took the floor and presented the progress made. There was also a brief presentation of the Demo projects supported by DG NEAR which constitute an integral part of the WES project.

An important part of the meeting was devoted to discuss the plans for the coming year, upon which the Workplan for 2021 was endorsed unanimously by the WES Steering Committee.

The WES Steering Committee consists of the WES Water and Environment Focal Points from the Partner Countries, the European Commission, the WES institutional partners (the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the Mediterranean Action Plan/UN Environment) and was attended also by representatives of WES Demonstration projects and a number of regional organisations.

“ *...Moving together towards a more sustainable Mediterranean is more important than ever.* ”

Michael Scoullos,
WES Team Leader Professor

Successful Water Accounting training

Water Accounting is a vital tool to achieve integrated water governance and a sustainable water balance. In order to establish proper Water Accounting, more than 50 participants participated in the two-week regional training on Water Accounting. Through an on-line platform, water experts from relevant ministries and statistical offices, followed a 20 hours intensive on-line training with lectures and workshops presented by European, regional and local experts.

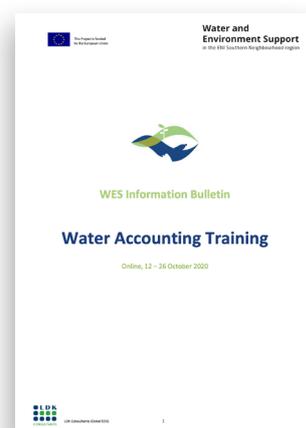
The training revolved around the overall concept of water accounts, their environmental and economic components, the benefits of water accounting and the use of water accounting outputs in reporting on the progress made towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Participants were introduced to Physical Flow accounts and Physical Assets accounts, using the UN System of Environmental Economic Accounting for Water (SEEA-W) and to various monitoring frameworks. During break-out working groups, newly acquired knowledge was brought into practice through practical exercises and provided opportunity to further exchange experiences between participating practitioners from the Northern and Southern Mediterranean countries.

According to WES trainers George Bariamis and Eric Mino “Water Accounting is showing us how we treat the environment and how our natural capital can be quantified. It helps us to ensure not to further degrade the environment. All Mediterranean countries therefore need to start working systematically on collecting the necessary and relevant

data”. This training gave participants the opportunity to take advantage of the European partnership with the region and to experience European water accounts and statistics. The trainers tried to convey that team work with different colleagues is vital in order to develop those accounts and explained the need to use standard classifications like SEEA. Through case studies from different countries in Europe and the region, useful examples were provided. It became also clear that in this field European countries are also still learning.

Majeda Alawneh, who participated in the training on behalf of the Palestinian Water Authority, acknowledged that the training was very interesting and that it provided her with useful tools for Water Accounting and how they should be used. Hosam el Nagar from the Egyptian Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation added that it was a very good opportunity to also meet (even virtually) colleagues from other countries to exchange experiences and that it gave him a very good introduction to the subject and to learn that there are different systems that can be used and applied to establish proper water accounts.

The information bulletin with a summary of the event and links to all relevant documentation can be found [here](#).



“ *Water Accounting is showing us how we treat the environment and how our natural capital can be quantified. It helps us to ensure not to further degrade the environment. All Mediterranean countries therefore need to start working systematically on collecting the necessary and relevant data.* ”

George Bariamis and Eric Mino

WES trainers

Two new WES activities starting in Palestine

Medical waste is one of the most difficult substances to handle. It is considered hazardous because it may possess infection dangers and can cause unsafe effects on the environment and human health. The collection, transportation, treatment and disposal of medical waste therefore constitutes an environmental problem that poses an important health risk and calls for an integrated and sustainable management.

In Palestine, several remediation measures have been proposed to tackle the problematic areas of medical waste management. It is clear though, that more efforts need to be made to improve the medical waste management in an effective and integrated manner. Cooperation among key actors of the medical waste chain is pivotal, including the Ministry of Health, the Environmental Quality Authority, the Ministry of Local Government and also Non-Governmental Organisations working in this field as well as the private sector. WES has now started to support the different actors to promote sustainable medical waste management solutions in Palestine. The project will support the country with the update of the Master Plan for Healthcare waste management.



At the same time, another WES activity has commenced to support Palestine in the establishment of new approaches to optimize irrigation. Palestine has already taken important steps in water management, starting in 2014 with the Water Law which provided for the establishment of Water User Associations. The Water Quality Department of the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) is therefore pleased that this activity will focus on bringing together various stakeholders, ranging from the Ministry of Agriculture to the PWA and various water users- and farmers associations. Water resources in Palestine are very scarce and therefore WES will look into ways to strategically use treated waste water in a safe, sustainable and integrated manner in order to release the pressure on the available water resources.”

Alleviating water scarcity in Jordan

Water scarcity in Jordan is increasingly getting more severe, with annual per capita shares of renewable fresh-water resources being less than 60 m³ per capita. According to the World Health Organisation, Jordan will enter a state of “extreme water poverty” by 2025 if no major advancements are made. The rapid urban growth in Jordan has been accompanied by a reduction of recharge to the groundwater sources and an increase in storm water flows. Because of a drastic reduction of natural infiltration areas for water, there is a severe loss of water yields to groundwater. Jordan has recently also witnessed a sharp increase in flood severity resulting in loss of lives and properties as well as in destruction of infrastructure. Therefore, dealing with storm water has become more important than ever and new concepts of how to retain storm water need to be explored.



WES has started to support Jordan in exploring the potential of Natural Water Retention Measures (NWRM). The activity will adapt good practices in this field from other countries and to determine which measures are most appropriate to apply in the country. According to Demetris Zarris, LDK’s expert leading this activity, Natural Water Retention Measures are considered as good and cheap solutions to alleviate water scarcity and to mitigate flood risk as those measures are natural, and therefore not much additional infrastructure may be needed. Furthermore, Natural Water Retention Measures are multi-functional measures that aim to protect water resources which are addressing water related challenges while restoring or maintaining natural ecosystems.

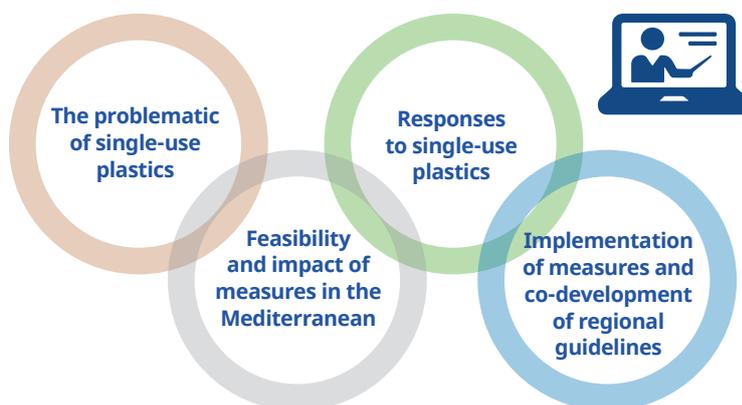
This activity will focus on screening measures that are applicable to arid and semi-arid areas, after which two pilot zones for the project activities will be selected. One pilot zone will be in a peri-urban area while the other will be in a rural or natural area. A number of NWRM will be designed, taking into account the benefits of water retention and the costs of applying those measures.

Regional training on Phasing out Single-Use Plastics

Plastic pollution is one of the major challenges of our times. In particular, the issue of marine plastic pollution 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.

In response to this major challenge, the EU 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. 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. The Union for the Mediterranean's 2030 GreenerMed Agenda (to be endorsed by the 2nd UfM Ministerial Meeting on Environment and Climate Change, planned for 2021) includes circular economy, minimization of plastics and marine litter among its 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 2020-2021 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.

Therefore, in support of all of the above, and to strengthen the skills and capacities of policy staff from the Ministries of Environment, representatives of the productive sector (plastics producers, relevant association) and CSO representatives, the Water and Environment Support project (WES) is currently organising four webinars over January and February 2021 to identify, prioritise and operationalise targeted measures to phase out SUPs. The webinars will focus on:



A parallel regional peer-to-peer (P2P) activity of WES on the same topic was launched in November 2020. The overall objective of the P2P activity is to reinforce capacity, support the sharing of experiences and expertise and stimulate cooperation among the peers for the implementation of measures to reduce consumption and leakage of Single Use Plastics (SUP) into the environment. Two P2P sessions have already taken place on the 9th of November 2020 and 10th of December 2020, while the exchange will continue at least till March 2021.

The webinars and P2P process 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.



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