



D1.4 MEDIGREEN mid-term policy brief

From dialogue to action for a sustainable Mediterranean



MEDIGREEN
Mediterranean approach
towards a maritime European
Green Deal in MSP



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Index

1. Executive Summary	5
2. Setting the Scene	5
3. First insights: Technical Deliverables	6
4. Relevance of MEDIGREEN early findings for the policy landscape	7



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“MEDIGREEN mid-term policy brief: from dialogue to action for a sustainable Mediterranean”

Connecting early insights to European and regional policy frameworks

1. Executive Summary

This mid-term Policy Brief presents early MEDIGREEN findings with a focus on their relevance for European and Mediterranean policy discussions related to Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP).

The document first outlines the main activities and technical insights achieved so far, including the assessment of how European Green Deal (EGD) priorities are currently reflected in Mediterranean EU MSP plans and the development of communication tools to support stakeholder understanding and engagement.

The core value of this Policy Brief lies in the policy connections emerging from these findings. Early results confirm the growing relevance of MSP as a framework to support the Green Deal transition in the Mediterranean, while also highlighting persistent challenges related to policy coherence, data availability, governance fragmentation and social inclusion. Key interfaces between MSP and sectoral policies –particularly fisheries, nature protection, climate action and offshore renewable energy– emerge as critical entry points for strengthening alignment and coordination. Overall, MEDIGREEN’s early findings show that MSP provides a valuable platform for cross-sectoral dialogue and spatial coordination at the sea-basin level; however, its effectiveness depends on stronger linkages with complementary policy instruments, reinforced governance mechanisms and targeted, inclusive communication. These insights provide a basis for further policy reflection and will be developed in the final phase of the project.

2. Setting the Scene

The MEDIGREEN project aims to promote the integration of the **European Green Deal (EGD)** into the development of four key sectors—**offshore renewable energy (ORE), fisheries, aquaculture, and nature protection**—through **Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP)**.

This purpose was the central theme of the MEDIGREEN Opening Conference, held on January 28, 2025, in Madrid, which brought together key stakeholders in MSP, particularly from the Mediterranean. The conference, which marked the project’s official launch and was intended as more than a dissemination event, initiated an important dialogue to engage stakeholders on two key questions: ***How can maritime spatial planning help sectors meet the objectives of the European Green Deal?*** And ***what are the main challenges and limitations for the Mediterranean sea basin?***

These questions called for a regional, collaborative response; therefore, synergies with existing Mediterranean governance and policy instruments were emphasised as essential for fostering cooperation and a shared regional vision. These include the **Barcelona Convention** and its legally binding Protocol on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (**ICZM Protocol**), which together provide the key legal framework for integrated coastal and marine governance in the Mediterranean, alongside policy instruments such as the **UNEP/MAP MSP Conceptual**

Framework and Roadmap and the Union for the Mediterranean’s Sustainable Blue Economy Roadmap, as well as governance and coordination mechanisms including the Mediterranean MSP Community of Practice (**MED-MSP-CoP**) and the **UNEP/MAP working group on MSP** (WG MSP). Together, these instruments are particularly relevant for strengthening coherence between EU and non-EU countries sharing the same sea basin.

While specific issues across sectors (e.g., related to the need to strengthen integration of small-scale fisheries or offshore renewable energy in MSP) were highlighted, common messages also emerged across the discussions: MSP enables long-term planning, helps allocate space for activities while avoiding biodiversity-sensitive areas and conflicts, and fosters dialogue and the sharing of good practices. Participants stressed the need for ecosystem-based approaches, data harmonisation, and stronger stakeholder engagement, while acknowledging limitations such as fragmented governance, knowledge gaps, and the complexity of administrative processes. The conference concluded with a clear message: **regional cooperation and cross-sectoral coordination are indispensable**. By strengthening stakeholder engagement, improving data exchange, and promoting a common vision, **MSP can become a key enabler of the European Green Deal** and, in general, sustainable maritime development in the Mediterranean.

MEDIGREEN aims to lead the transformation of knowledge into action by developing flagship solutions that make it a tangible goal to integrate the objectives of the European Green Deal into Mediterranean maritime planning.

3. First insights: Technical Deliverables

During the first half of the project, MEDIGREEN developed two key groundwork activities: (1) assessing the State of Play of sector-related EGD components within MSP plans of EU Mediterranean countries (Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Slovenia, Spain), and (2) developing strategies for communicating MSP-EGD in the Mediterranean (all materials are publicly accessible at www.medigreenproject.eu).

3.1 What have we found so far?

The first MEDIGREEN project deliverable (Deliverable 2.1) shows that **the integration of EGD priorities into Mediterranean MSPs** (visions, objectives and measures) **has progressed in the sectors of fisheries, aquaculture, ORE and nature protection, albeit with varying scope and depth**. Biodiversity protection stands out as the most consistently addressed dimension, while adaptation measures and nature-based solutions remain weakly embedded.

Spatial zoning, as a core operational tool of MSP, translates policy priorities into concrete spatial allocations and compatibility rules. Across EU Mediterranean MSPs, zoning is most developed for sectors with fixed spatial footprints, such as aquaculture, ORE, and nature protection, whereas more dynamic activities, such as fisheries, are generally addressed through horizontal provisions rather than exclusive spatial designations. Nature protection displays the most robust and harmonised zoning patterns, reflecting EU conservation obligations, while ORE zoning remains emerging and uneven across countries.

Overall, EGD priorities are unevenly integrated into Mediterranean MSPs. Biodiversity protection is widely reflected in spatial measures, while ecosystem restoration remains limited. Climate change mitigation is primarily addressed through ORE development, whereas climate change adaptation and nature-based solutions remain poorly integrated. Sustainable seafood

production is partially reflected through fisheries and aquaculture measures, although linkages between MSP and fisheries policy remain constrained. Circular economy and zero-pollution objectives remain marginal, typically addressed through isolated measures rather than strategic, spatially driven approaches.

Across all four sectors, MSP processes demonstrate a strong recognition of stakeholder participation as a component of a fair and just transition. However, variations persist in inclusivity, clarity of engagement frameworks and the degree of stakeholder influence on decision-making.

While MSP readiness is visible through zoning tools, monitoring programmes and participatory bodies, implementation is constrained by data and knowledge gaps –particularly for small-scale fisheries, impacts and key biodiversity components– limited enforcement capacity, fragmented governance and policy misalignments.

3.2 Communicating EGD-MSP in the Mediterranean

Through Deliverable 4.1, MEDIGREEN consolidated a structured evidence base on **how to communicate about EGD and MSP in the language and cultural context of the Mediterranean**, highlighting the role of targeted communication in supporting a coherent sea-basin approach aligned with EGD objectives. This work combined a dedicated literature review with expert and partner validation, including an online focus group and a validation workshop. It led to the co-design of three complementary communication formats: factsheets offering policy-relevant overviews of MSP concepts and sectors; flashcards providing concise, visually driven summaries for training and workshops; and short animated videos translating complex MSP concepts into accessible narratives. All materials were developed in multilingual formats (Arabic, French, and English) to ensure cross-border usability.

Validation results confirm that clear, visually structured communication significantly improves understanding of MSP and its links to EGD priorities. Factsheets and short animations proved most effective for policy communication, while flashcards were particularly suitable for educational and workshop settings. The materials were assessed as valuable both for digital dissemination (e.g. 30–60 second social media videos) and for face-to-face engagement. Multilingual and culturally adapted content was identified as essential for engagement beyond EU Member States, with minor wording adjustments further enhancing international cooperation and stakeholder ownership.

MEDIGREEN communication materials can be directly used by policymakers and competent authorities to support stakeholder engagement in MSP processes, facilitate cross-border dialogue through shared multilingual references, strengthen coherence between MSP, the EGD and Blue Economy strategies, enhance capacity building in emerging MSP contexts, and reduce resistance by clearly communicating the purpose, scope and added value of MSP for local economies and ecosystems.

4. Relevance of MEDIGREEN early findings for the policy landscape

Building on early MEDIGREEN findings, this section outlines key policy entry points and interfaces that need to be taken into account to enhance the operationalisation of EGD objectives through MSP in the Mediterranean.

Despite the work that remains to be done, early MEDIGREEN findings already show relevance for understanding the role of MSP in supporting the Green Deal in the Mediterranean. In

particular, the results point to the importance of policy coherence across sectoral frameworks and to the clarification of interfaces between MSP and key EU policies (such as the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), Biodiversity Strategy, and offshore renewable energy strategies). Addressing this misalignment could facilitate overcoming other specific challenges in achieving EGD objectives within the marine environment.

Across policy areas, early findings confirm that **MSP performs most effectively where objectives are clearly defined and spatially explicit**, while its contribution becomes more limited when addressing dynamic or strongly sector-driven challenges. This is reflected, for example, in the uneven implementation of multi-use approaches, which are often highlighted as promising tools for reconciling competing policy objectives but remain context-dependent and limited in practice. Multi-use is therefore not a universal solution, but rather one option that may be further explored within the scope of the MSP Directive.

MSP faces critical data gaps that must be addressed, particularly regarding the spatial effort and footprint of small-scale fisheries, biodiversity, and ecological connectivity. This issue is closely connected to the CFP, MSFD, and the Habitats Directive. Such gaps risk undermining the proper application of different EGD elements in the context of a Fair and Just Transition—for instance due to the spatial underestimation of artisanal fisheries within MSP—and hinder progress towards achieving Good Environmental Status (GES). Insufficient spatial data also constrain the design and proportionality of spatial management measures, such as access restrictions, fisheries limits, or navigation-related measures in ecologically sensitive areas. Addressing these challenges would benefit from strengthened surveys and monitoring programmes aligned with, and complementary to, existing policy initiatives. In this context, **more spatially explicit assessments and measures under the MSFD—and the ongoing revision of the Directive—offer an important opportunity to reinforce synergies with MSP.**

Across all analysed countries, fisheries appear to be the most disconnected sector from MSP. This multifaceted challenge is shaped by several factors, including significant data gaps that hinder proper characterisation of the sector. **Greater resources should be allocated to science-based identification of fishing grounds, with particular emphasis on small-scale fisheries (SSF).** At the EU level, fisheries are governed by the CFP, articulated by Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs). However, the mandate for fisheries controls within MSP remains ambiguous. To address this, **coherence and clear linkages between MSP and fisheries must be reinforced**, ensuring that CFP and RFMOs regulations are effectively translated into spatial provisions supporting their objectives.

The iterative nature of MSP remains a key asset in this context. **Emphasising MSP as a cyclical and adaptive process**—where each planning round builds on previous experience—can support the gradual refinement of objectives, data use and implementation mechanisms, **leading over time to more operational and effective plans.**

Beyond sectoral integration, MEDIGREEN findings also point to gaps in addressing the social dimension of MSP. In relation to a Fair and Just Transition, there is currently no assessment of the socio-economic impacts of MSP, nor clarity on how benefits and impacts are distributed among different stakeholder categories. **The MSP Directive should therefore incorporate socio-economic impact assessments**, including the identification of benefit distribution across stakeholder groups. This issue is closely linked to stakeholder engagement: **the Directive should reinforce minimum requirements for engagement procedures, ensuring fair representation of small-scale actors and greater transparency regarding influence.**

MEDIGREEN findings highlight the role of targeted community-specific communication as a key enabler of awareness raising and stakeholder engagement in MSP processes. Results confirm that **clear, visually structured communication significantly improves understanding of MSP and its links to EGD objectives**. Multilingual and culturally adapted materials were consistently identified as essential for fostering understanding, ownership, and participation, reinforcing their relevance for inclusive and fair MSP processes. These findings underline that **effective communication is not a supplementary activity but a strategic component of MSP implementation**—particularly at the transboundary level and across diverse policy frameworks, where the absence of common concepts and standards often poses challenges.

Beyond effective communication, governance mechanisms also require reinforcement to ensure coherent and collaborative MSP implementation across sea basins. In the Mediterranean, **cross-border governance must be strengthened, moving from ad-hoc projects towards durable, mandate-backed cooperation**. In this context, MEDIGREEN highlights the synergetic role of the MED-MSP-CoP and the UNEP/MAP MSP Working Group from the Barcelona Convention as key platforms for structured policy dialogue, knowledge exchange and coordination between EU and non-EU countries.

Finally, early findings are also relevant for ongoing discussions on climate and ocean health. While MSP offers a robust framework for addressing clearly defined and spatially explicit objectives—such as biodiversity protection designations under the Habitats and Birds Directives—**MSP's role in tackling more dynamic and strategic challenges, including climate change adaptation, zero pollution, and circular economy, remains insufficiently operationalised**. To bridge this gap, **MSP should establish stronger strategic linkages with these policies**, facilitating their implementation in the marine domain within their scope of competence. This could be achieved through spatially relevant measures, such as, in the case of zero pollution and circular economy, circular infrastructure nodes, clean-port networks, and end-of-life pathways for aquaculture systems and fishing gear. In line with Priority 1 of the European Ocean Pact—Protecting and restoring ocean health—**MSP should integrate effective restoration actions and safeguard blue carbon habitats within a Climate-smart MSP approach**. To strengthen climate integration, **MSP should mainstream Nature-based Solutions (NbS) for adaptation**, such as clear criteria for seagrass habitat protection, coastal buffers, and reef or biogenic structures. In addition, **impact mitigation efforts should be reinforced through robust cumulative-impact assessments, Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA), and evidence aligned with the MSFD**.