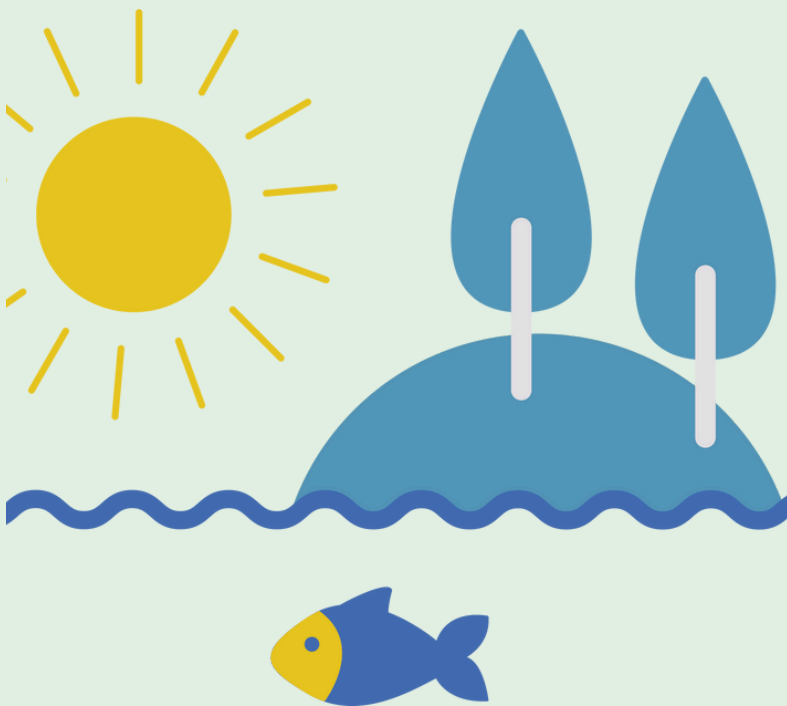


MEDLAB THEMATIC TALKS

Natural disasters in the Mediterranean

Tackling wildfires, floods, and droughts requires a united effort - Interreg programmes in the Mediterranean are making it happen by joining forces with other EU funds. The collaboration, strategic action, and innovative solutions developed by partners in the region are strengthening disaster resilience and climate adaptation across the Mediterranean.



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ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

Addressing natural disasters in the Mediterranean requires collective action and effective cooperation. Fires, floods, and droughts pose significant risks, necessitating coordinated responses that go beyond national and programme boundaries. By leveraging synergies between Interreg programmes and other EU funds, stakeholders can strengthen climate resilience, improve early warning systems, and implement sustainable solutions.

Discussions have highlighted the importance of integrating funding mechanisms, aligning strategies across regions, and ensuring knowledge exchange among practitioners. Lessons from past initiatives highlight how joint actions can enhance impact, reduce duplication, and create long-term benefits for Mediterranean communities.

This publication presents key insights from the exchanges on disaster risk reduction, with a focus on practical approaches and collaborative efforts. While these discussions took place during the MedLab Thematic Week, the findings reflect broader challenges and opportunities for strengthening cooperation in the Mediterranean.

Looking ahead, fostering collaboration among Mediterranean stakeholders will be key to ensuring environmental and social challenges are tackled collectively. Through continuous dialogue and innovative partnerships, initiatives like MedLab contribute to building a more resilient and sustainable Mediterranean region.

DEVELOPING COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES TO TACKLE FIRES, FLOODS, AND DROUGHTS TOGETHER

Interreg programmes play a crucial role in addressing climate-induced disasters by complementing and integrating efforts with other EU funds, such as Horizon Europe, LIFE, and ERDF. By aligning funding streams and fostering collaboration between different initiatives, these programmes create a more coordinated and impactful response to wildfires, floods, and droughts in the Mediterranean. The discussion among practitioners highlighted that continuity, cooperation, and capitalisation are the basis for synergies between initiatives. There is always a connection between projects. This is exemplified by the OPCC2 project, which builds on the work of Interreg POCTEFA and capitalises on results from HORIZON and LIFE to develop climate adaptation strategies in the Pyrenees. Synergies go beyond thematic priorities and individual projects; they depend on shaping processes that empower beneficiaries. By fostering more inclusive and flexible collaboration, we can enhance impact and achieve long-term, meaningful results.

People-centred cooperation for resilience and long-term change

Effective disaster management is about more than just funding – it is about people. Interreg’s bottom-up approach ensures that those directly facing climate risks, from local authorities to emergency responders, are actively involved in designing and implementing solutions.

One of the key challenges in cooperation is the presence of restrictive rules that can hinder collaboration rather than facilitate it. When processes become too rigid, they can unintentionally exclude those who should be at the forefront of decision-making and action. Cooperation must focus on people - not just financial resources. It is crucial to engage those directly facing challenges and value their contributions. However, bridging the gap between policymakers and implementers remains a challenge.

Turning knowledge into action: bridging science, policy, and practice

Effective cooperation ensures that knowledge is not just shared but actively applied where it can drive real change. Partners and beneficiaries play a vital role in creating synergies and complementarities, ensuring that decision-makers, implementers, and citizens are effectively engaged in the process. The discussion during the MedLab Thematic Week highlighted how Interreg facilitates this by linking researchers, policymakers, and practitioners, translating scientific insights into practical solutions. Strengthening connections across programmes was also emphasised to ensure continuity in project development and maximise impact. One example mentioned was the Natural Heritage Mission co-financed by Interreg Euro-MED which includes the results of 14 Interreg Euro-MED co-financed projects aiming its policy reach and transferability. Strengthening connections across programmes was also emphasised to ensure continuity in project development and maximise impact.

From innovation to implementation: capitalising on lessons learnt in action

Often, continuity is penalised in the name of innovation, and what we need to do is to consolidate those processes that enable the creation of a fertile environment and the condition of these processes to grow over – was another point stressed by the discussion participants. Highlighting that continuity and capitalisation are key to making disaster resilience efforts sustainable. By building on past projects, upscaling successful strategies, and avoiding duplication, Interreg ensures that each initiative contributes to a broader, long-term vision. Olivier Baudelet from DG REGIO emphasised the need to avoid a “silos approach” and instead foster synergies that reinforce impact. The Floodguard project’s real-time geospatial monitoring system is now being integrated into national disaster response frameworks, showcasing how Interreg initiatives can lead to broader policy changes. As Annalies Broekman pointed out, “We learn from experience, and this should be strengthened further.”

INTERREG PROGRAMMES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SUPPORT OF NATURAL DISASTERS - SOME FACTS

To frame the overview of projects contributing to natural disaster prevention, we selected **four themes** from the keep.eu database and applied them to the Interreg programmes working in the Mediterranean region:

- Managing natural and man-made threats, risk management
- Waterways, lakes and rivers
- Agriculture and fisheries and forestry
- Climate change and biodiversity

These broad themes help capture a range of topics relevant to natural risks such as fires, floods, and droughts. However, not all projects within these themes focus directly on these aspects, while some relevant projects might not be explicitly classified under these categories.

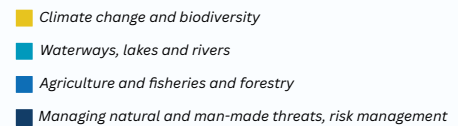
Project incidence and distribution

Out of 1,420 projects analysed in Mediterranean Interreg programmes, 318 (22%) are consistent with the wider topic of nature risk prevention. However, the distribution varies significantly between programmes:

- Highest proportion: Interreg Sudoe (42%)
- Lowest proportion: Interreg Italy-Albania-Montenegro (10%)
- Other high-scoring programmes: Interreg Italy-Malta (38%) and Italy-Tunisia (36%)

Among the 318 projects identified:

- 43% (136 projects) focus on Agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors
- 32% (101 projects) targeting management of natural and man-made threats, risk management.



Natural disasters: projects per sector (14-20)

Financial investment

The total investment by the 17 programmes in projects addressing topics relevant to climate change and natural disasters amounts to €528.2 million during 2014-2020 period, representing 23.6% of the total project budget (€2.239 billion, EU + co-financing).

In terms of budget intensity Sudoe, Italy-Malta and Italy-Croatia show the highest share in allocation, nearly 40%

Partner involvement

In 2014-2020 funding period, a total of 1,894 project partners are engaged in projects addressing climate change and natural disasters, making up 23% of all project partners (8,427).

The highest concentration of such partners is found in:

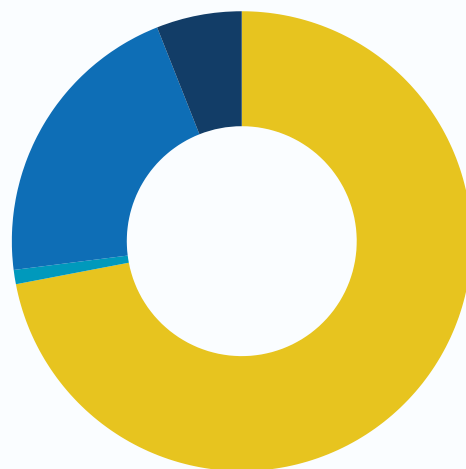
- Italy-Tunisia (37%)
- Italy-Malta (35%)
- Italy-Croatia (30%)

2021-2027 PROGRAMME TRENDS

At the end of 2024, six Mediterranean programmes had uploaded project data for the 2021-2027 period, with 67 projects listed on keep.eu.

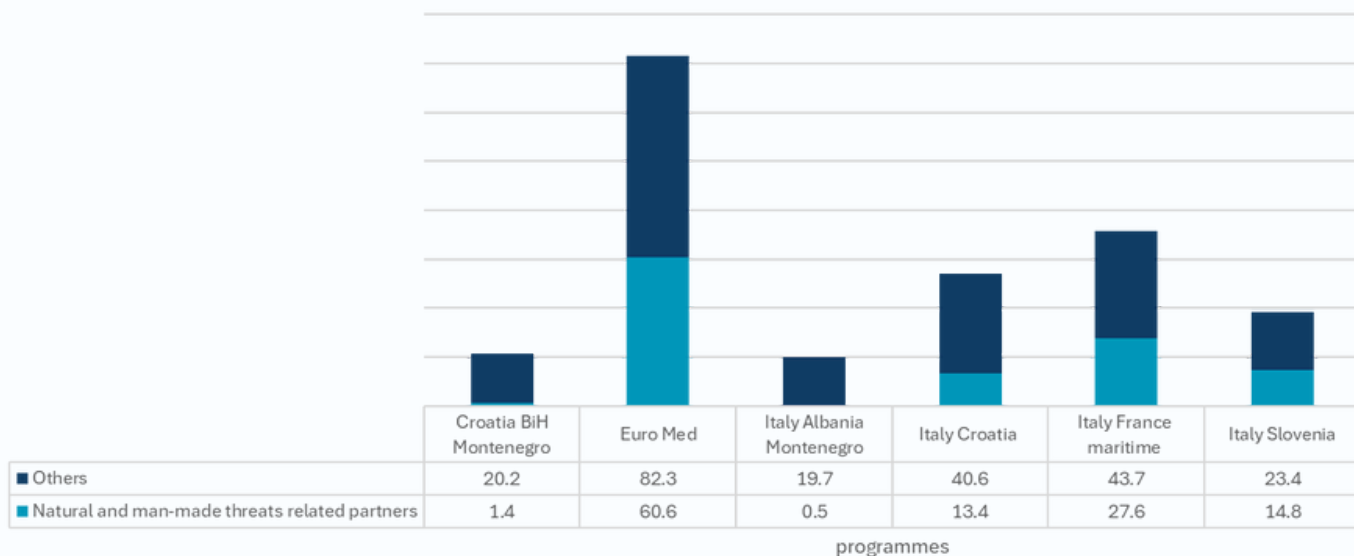
- 48 of these (72%) relate to managing natural and man-made threats and risk management, an increase from 32% in 2014-2020.
- Overall, the intensity of projects focusing on topics related to climate change, nature and disaster prevention increased by 40%.
- Most 2021-2027 projects submitted under the first calls fall under the heading – climate change and biodiversity, showing a reduced focus on agriculture, fisheries and forestry topics in comparison to the 2014-2020 distribution.

- Climate change and biodiversity
- Waterways, lakes and rivers
- Agriculture and fisheries and forestry
- Managing natural and man-made threats, risk management



Natural disasters: projects per sector (21-27)

For the 2021-2027 period, the budget share so far contracted for projects addressing topics considered for this analysis and related to nature disaster prevention is 34% (€118.3 million out of €348.2 million). This is higher than the 24% share of projects in 2014-2020, suggesting an increase of investment intensity per programme in this area



Natural disasters project share in relation to the overall committed budget to projects (21-27). Data as of Dec 2024

Explore keep.eu yourself

The statistics presented here are not fixed; they can change based on filters and parameters used, and they evolve as more data from the 2021-2027 programming period is added. We encourage users to explore keep.eu and apply different filters to generate insights relevant to their needs.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM PRACTITIONERS



Annalies Broekman

Building on the work delivered by the Natural Heritage Mission co-financed by Interreg Euro-MED

Synergies go beyond themes and projects, most important are the people motivated and capacitated to shape the process to empower beneficiaries. By strengthening the position and tools available for these multiplying actors, we can strengthen impact and ensure long-term, meaningful results. Learning across programmes and experiences is key, and a strategic roadmap is in mind when we develop the projects. Multiplying actors have an instinct for capitalisation, and they want to see the results of their work flourish. Often, continuity is penalised in the name of innovation, and what we need to do is to consolidate those processes that enable the creation of a fertile environment and the condition for these processes to induce transformative change.



Dr. Thanasis Hadzilacos

Building on the work of the ERMIS-F project co-financed by Interreg Greece - Cyprus 2014-2020

Cooperation is essential to look for cross-border solutions - we value it. However, overly restrictive rules limit our ability to collaborate effectively. It's like securing a house so tightly that even the rightful owners struggle to enter and participate in the process.



Juan Terrádez

Building on the work of the project OPCC2 co-funded by Interreg POCTEFA

When we start a new project, we always capitalise on lessons learned from past projects to transfer and upscale the results. Continuity, cooperation and capitalisation are the basis for following an action plan. How do we build links between funds? In the Pyrenees, a bioregion between three countries that cooperates to preserve mountain biodiversity, avoid administrative border obstacles, and improve specific hazards, POCTEFA, the main programme working in the Pyrenees, builds the basis and networks to develop new solutions through other funds further and, finally, with LIFE to upscale the results to other authorities managing solutions in other mountain regions in Europe.

MEDLAB - FOR STRONGER COOPERATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN



© CORALLO project co-funded by Interreg Italy-Malta programme

About the MedLab

[Seventeen Interreg programmes](#) operate in the Mediterranean Sea Basin. To maximise the impact and efficiency of EU funds, Medlab was established in 2020 to strengthen cooperation, foster synergies, and promote a fresh approach to territorial cooperation. It has progressively evolved into a platform for multilevel dialogue, bringing together stakeholders from various levels of governance.

Medlab started as a top-down initiative, co-led by the Commission, and bringing together heads of joint secretariats and managing authorities of the seventeen Interreg programmes working in the Mediterranean region, with WestMed and EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region.

In 2014-2020 the seventeen Interreg programmes active in the Mediterranean committed over two billion euros to advance joint solutions addressing challenges partners in the Mediterranean region face.

Importance of cooperation

The Mediterranean region has entered a new era of European cooperation with the historic appointment of a dedicated Commissioner for the Mediterranean, Ms Dubravka Šuica. As highlighted by Simona Pohlova and Olivier Baudalet from DG Regional and Urban Policy, this shift from a sectorial to a geographical approach represents a significant political signal with immense potential.

DG REGIO colleagues stressed the need to avoid the “silos approach”, underlining how the various sectors are deeply interconnected, especially where environment is concerned.

Interreg projects play a key role in driving long-term initiatives, complementing other funding programmes, and mainstreaming policies for lasting impact.

Interreg’s people-to-people approach remains the most effective strategy for tackling environmental challenges in the Mediterranean, while ensuring a shift in mindset among younger generations is crucial. It also stands out as an ideal tool for balancing territorial priorities, cross-border cooperation, and alignment with broader EU policies.

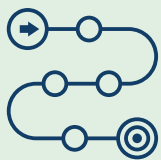
USEFUL LINKS



[Euro-Mediterranean Hub for R&I](https://euromedhub-ri.org/) aiming to support the UfM Regional Policy Dialogue on Research and Innovation (R&I) and facilitating the implementation of R&I roadmaps on Health, Renewable Energies, and Climate Change. Among others, you will find the overview of available funding, networks and clusters: <https://euromedhub-ri.org/>



Find the factsheet on EU cooperation on Research and Innovation with the Mediterranean region here: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/beb1ee99-d8dc-11ed-a05c-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

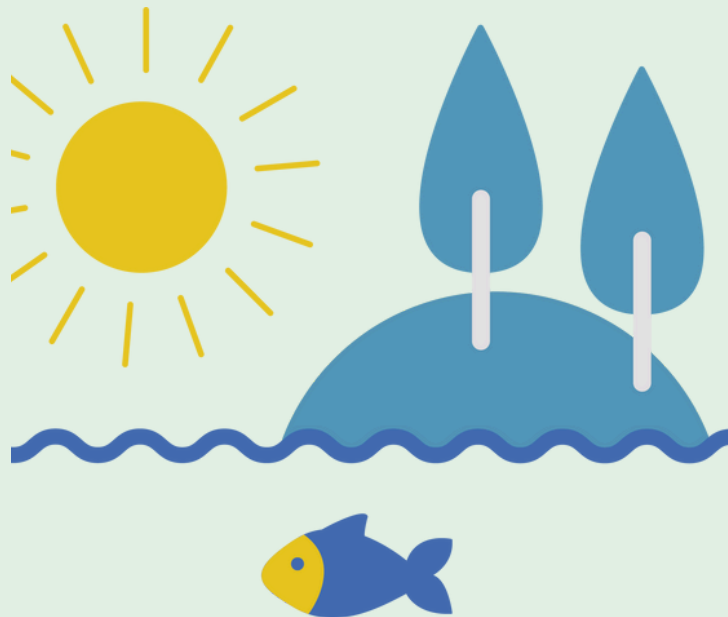


Union for the Mediterranean Regional Platform in Research and Innovation Roadmap is available here: https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/2021-06-21_UfM-Platform_Theories-of-Change-and-IPs_and_Horizontal-Integration_Final-Version.pdf

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Furthermore, understanding and knowledge evolves throughout the programming period. If you spot something out of date or inconsistent, please contact us at communication@interact.eu

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