

MEDITERRANEAN SOLUTIONS INTEGRATED INTO A GLOBAL VISION OF THE WATER CYCLE



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Water cycle: back and forth between oceans and continents

A significant proportion of the water that falls on the continents is quickly returned to the atmosphere, while the rest flows more or less directly towards the sea, where it eventually returns. Let us consider water as a whole by providing Mediterranean solutions to protect vulnerable water networks, mitigate the impacts of water-related disasters such as floods and droughts, secure access to water and water services, and manage water resources in an appropriate and equitable manner while respecting the balance of the seas and oceans.

These issues will be addressed through two specific round tables aimed at identifying solutions and discussing the following topics:

- Freshwater/Saltwater Alliance: Convergence of water and ocean policies in the Mediterranean
- Water risk management in coastal urban areas

Roundtable 1: Convergence of water and ocean policies in the Mediterranean

Water policies, historically structured around the small cycle (production, distribution, sanitation), have shaped landscapes, standards, and public investment throughout the Mediterranean. With financial power and a central role in land use planning, water stakeholders have gradually opened up to the large cycle through IWRM (Integrated Water Resources Management) initiatives.

However, the ocean—and in particular the Mediterranean, a semi-enclosed, overexploited, and vulnerable sea—remains largely outside the operational scope of water institutions.

The United Nations Decade of Ocean Science and the dynamics of UNOC 2025 call for potential revisions to institutional boundaries: water stakeholders must become ocean stakeholders.

The Mediterranean can be a laboratory for the water-ocean transition because, as a territory with a strong magnifying effect (human density, water stress, marine pollution, institutional fragmentation), it is the ideal place to forge a new alliance between water and the ocean, based on:

- shared tools,
- common objectives (resilience, carbon neutrality, biodiversity),
- and governance that reconciles the health of land and sea.

The time has come to transform water institutions into full-fledged players in climate and marine governance.

Roundtable 2: Water risk management in coastal urban areas

The Mediterranean region is being hit hard by extreme weather events, droughts, and flash floods, which are having catastrophic consequences for the populations living around the Mediterranean. Climate forecasts predict that these events will worsen. Coupled with temperature changes that are much greater than the global average and severe degradation of natural ecosystems, the situation of water crisis management risks becoming permanent in the region. Furthermore, external shocks can amplify the impacts of intensifying extreme events by producing cascading effects that countries cannot bear alone.

The recommendations of the 5th Mediterranean Water Forum (Tunis, February 2024) focused on the following actions:

- Implement modern tools in each region to understand and predict the impacts of climate change on water management (floods and droughts), enabling adaptation and risk management.
- Adopt disruptive approaches to development and management in order to adapt to new phenomena.
- Facilitate intersectoral and inter-state cooperation.
- Support countries' efforts to establish early warning systems for both floods and droughts by 2027 at the latest; the EW4Med project will pave the way for this objective in 2025.

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