



FINAL EVALUATION

**M1M2 - ENSURING INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF RIVER BASINS  
2017-2022**

09.11.2022

# 1. INTRODUCTION

River basins in the Mediterranean face multiple threats, including water abstraction and harmful infrastructure development. These factors also make them extremely vulnerable to climate change.

Focused on protecting Mediterranean river basins, our partnership consists of 12 organisations and their networks working across the Mediterranean. Together, we are committed to ensuring river basin conservation. This involves promoting integrated water management, increasing understanding about the value of wetlands, particularly rivers and their ecosystem services, influencing policy and funding schemes, and improving regional transboundary cooperation. To strengthen river connectivity, we also promote alternatives to hydropower projects and the removal of obsolete dams.

To ensure impact, we identified priority landscapes across the Mediterranean and engaged in the conservation and restoration of the following basins: Douro, Tejo, and Guadiana (Portugal/Spain), Vjosa/Aoos (Albania/Greece), Mujib (Jordan), Medjerda (Algeria/Tunisia) and Sebou (Morocco). We also worked in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Slovenia.

## OBJECTIVES

- minimizing the impact of dams and other infrastructure on river basins by limiting the construction of new dams and removing obsolete ones;
- significantly reducing the environmental impact of water abstraction by ensuring sustainable water use for agriculture, energy, tourism, and domestic purposes;
- promoting and ensuring ecosystem restoration and recovery in basins, including the proper implementation of environmental flows and definition of protected areas for conservation.

### BUDGET ENGAGED

€ 11,130,000

### BUDGET PER STRATEGY

- Strengthening the partnership 8%
- Knowledge, innovation, and dissemination 15%
- Policy, advocacy, and lobbying 28%
- Public voice 18%
- IRBM 13%
- Restoration and conservation 11%
- Technical solutions 7%



## FIELD SITES



## THE PARTNERSHIP



euRONATUR

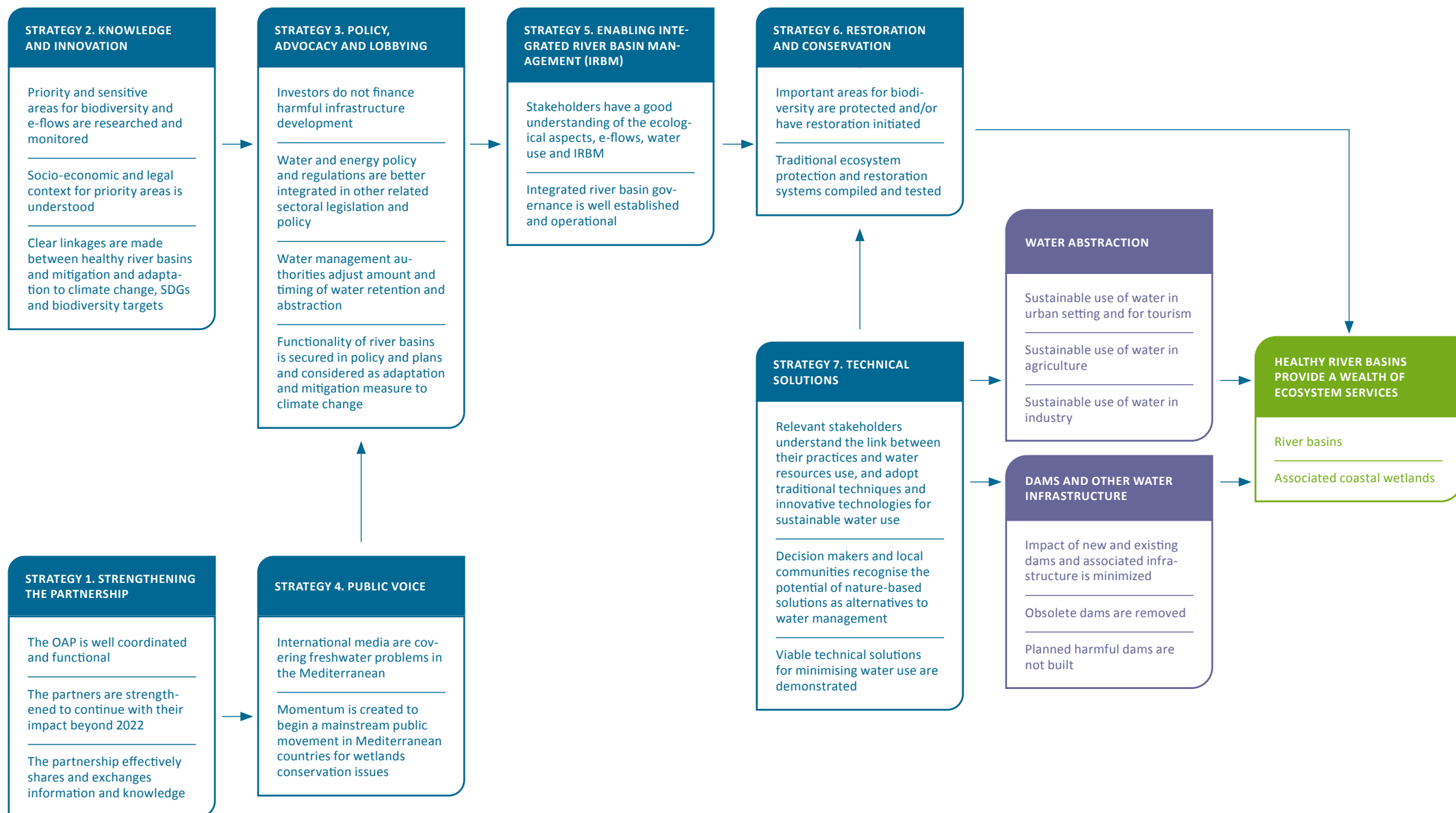


RiverWatch



Associate partners: AACOA, ACT, ANP | WWF Portugal, Bankwatch, CEDOUA, University of Coimbra, CIBIO, University of Porto, CIMO, Instituto Politécnico de Bragança, CITAB, Universidade de Trás-os Montes e Alto Douro, Client Earth, CZSS, Dinarica, DPRS, Eco-team, Eko-Svest, FCT, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Front 21/42, Ministry of Environment of Tunisia, Pravo na Vod, Rede Inducar, Res Publica, The Nature Conservancy, Uja





## 2. PROGRESS AND ACTIVITIES

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All rivers are connected, and so is our partnership. We focused on promoting integrated management of river basins and water resources, preventing the construction of infrastructure that impacts river connectivity, and ensuring the conservation and restoration of river basins throughout the Mediterranean together with the provision of ecosystem services.

In view of climate change, water scarcity, and biodiversity decline, we provided solutions for the conservation and restoration of river basins. We filled gaps in scientific knowledge and governance, engaging with all kinds of stakeholders in the process. We offered technical, financial, and legal support to civil society organisations, and delivered training programmes for lawyers, judges, and prosecutors to improve their knowledge of natural resource legislation. We also created an online knowledge hub on water legislation to ensure knowledge transfer.

And lastly, we made people's and our voices heard at national and international levels, empowering citizens dedicated to the protection and conservation of river basins to speak out.

### STRATEGY 1: STRENGTHENING THE PARTNERSHIP

To ensure the successful scaling and replication of our work beyond 2022, and foster relationships between NGOs in both the north and south of the Mediterranean, we set up a formal, well-structured partnership that enable us to act jointly and coherently. Our activities included:

- developing our Theory of Change to reflect current and future drivers of change and threats facing freshwater wetlands in the region;
- developing a partnership website showcasing the vision, mission, and ambitions of the partnership and all its projects, and focusing on financial sustainability beyond 2022;
- showcasing partner achievements and forecasting fundraising opportunities in international fora;
- developing a fundraising strategy jointly developing a fundraising strategy jointly with MAVA coastal wetlands partners;
- developing a joint project portfolio and presenting it to donors.

## STRATEGY 2: KNOWLEDGE, INNOVATION AND DISSEMINATION

To provide innovative solutions to tackle climate change and human impacts on river basins, we needed to improve knowledge on priority basins, including by:

- documenting hydrology, biodiversity, e-flows, climate change impacts, the socio-economic and legal context of priority basins, and best practices, including traditional ecological knowledge;
- mapping, hydro-morphological and sediment transport assessment, and the identification of priority river stretches for conservation and restoration;
- mapping existing, under construction, and planned dams in the Mediterranean Basin, including identifying no-go zones for grey infrastructure;
- promoting best practices in water and soil management for communities and government stakeholders.

## STRATEGY 3: POLICY, ADVOCACY AND LOBBYING

In the Mediterranean Basin, given the need to translate legislation into action, we sought to influence decision-makers and called for the implementation of integrated river basin and water management principles. Our activities included:

- improving national water-related policies such as those on irrigation, concessions, hydropower, protected areas, river basin restoration and dam removal;
- advocating for financial mechanisms and institutions to comply with and improve existing policies, to stop support for environmentally harmful projects, and promote river basin conservation and restoration;
- advocating for the creation of new protected areas and enlargement of existing ones;
- advocating for the creation and improvement of national and EU laws on river basin protection;
- building the capacity of legal experts in environmental law enforcement, and disseminating information on environmental legislation to communities and relevant stakeholders.

## STRATEGY 4: PUBLIC VOICE

To increase public engagement in freshwater conservation in the Mediterranean Basin, we delivered targeted communications, public outreach, and mobilisation. Our activities included:

- ensuring that national and international media reported on river basin matters in the Mediterranean;
- organising platforms, meetings, and conferences for NGOs, scientists, activists, artists, and legal practitioners to exchange knowledge, inspire, and empower each other, and commit to working in an integrated manner (e.g., through the European Rivers Summit);
- conducting communications campaigns to engage the public in freshwater topics;
- supporting individuals and groups to conserve and restore river basin ecosystems.

### STRATEGY 5: ENABLING INTEGRATED RIVER BASIN MANAGEMENT (IRBM)

Recognising the need to develop stakeholders' knowledge and strengthen technical expertise on IRBM to reach good ecological status of river basins, we promoted IRBM through:

- adapting models and mechanisms based on EU and/or national principles for promotion and use in different countries;
- convening stakeholders and promoting transboundary cooperation contributing to the implementation and/or improvement of transnational IRBM plans;
- supporting governments to develop and implement IRBM plans;
- working closely with the local government units and local communities to increase their capacity to use river ecosystem sustainably.

### STRATEGY 6: RESTORATION AND CONSERVATION

To ensure protection and restoration of river basins, we piloted initiatives focused on nature-based solutions and traditional water management practices by:

- elaborating and adopting restoration plans for river basins, including restoration of floodplain forests and wetlands;
- restoring wetlands and rivers to enhance their functions and services;
- removing barriers and promoting national programmes for removal of obsolete barriers to safeguard river connectivity;
- designating nature protected areas.

### STRATEGY 7: TECHNICAL SOLUTIONS

To convince decision-makers and local communities of the potential of nature-based solutions, we implemented demonstration projects and undertook capacity building to promote the adoption of traditional techniques and innovative technologies for sustainable water use. Our activities included:

- compiling traditional practices for sustainable water and land use and testing their effectiveness through field projects;
- building capacity on traditional practices for the benefit of the local populations;
- developing and testing innovative technologies for sustainable water use.

### KEY LESSONS

1. A comprehensive partnership with all stakeholders, including government and NGOs, and based on professional relationships is a key factor for success and sustainability of integrated river basin management.
2. Undertaking on-the-ground actions and achieving concrete results in partnership with stakeholders can build trust and influence plans and policies at a later stage.
3. Securing strong support from international donors, and using international mechanisms (e.g., Ramsar convention, UNESCO World Heritage) allows more flexibility and empowerment in negotiations with government bodies.
4. Working approach and strategies should be adapted to local contexts and vary according to a particular country's policies and governance.
5. Capacity building for all stakeholders is a key factor in increasing the chances of success, and in aligning stakeholder thinking.
6. Combining, interlinking, and joining efforts with different groups (scientists, activists, celebrities, artists, lawyers, etc.), leads to effective public outreach and improves policies and decision-making processes.
7. Climate change impacts, and the need for adaptation and mitigation, can help convince local and national authorities to conserve and restore wetlands and rivers as nature-based solutions.



### 3. ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACTS

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Within the limited timeframe of the project, and as illustrated in the Key Impact box (Page 12), we contributed to significant positive change in the seven main river basins where we worked.

As a partnership, we have helped change the way rivers, wetlands, and aquifers are perceived by water managers and local communities. These water bodies are no longer seen only as channels or reservoirs but also as valuable parts of the landscape providing important services and benefits that support healthy and sustainable livelihoods in the Mediterranean Basin.

We helped fill the scientific knowledge gap on water-related ecosystems in seven river basins, covering topics such as climate change, biodiversity, ecology, hydrology, hydromorphology, sediment transport, and renewable energy sources, as well as legal, spatial and economic contexts and cultural values. This new knowledge informed policies, field work by local communities, and decisions on water and landscape management. This led to genuine integrated water resource management and effective collaboration between stakeholders.

We also contributed to law enforcement and development of governance schemes to protect wetland and river biodiversity and ecosystems and ensure minimum conditions for water security and ecological connectivity. Our advocacy efforts prevented EU financing institutions and national water authorities from investing in initiatives such as new hydropower dams and other infrastructure that would have been harmful for biodiversity. And we presented and promoted alternative solutions that integrate water provision and services with nature conservation.

Finally, our partnership contributed to strengthening and expanding the community dedicated to wetlands and rivers conservation in the Mediterranean Basin. In some areas, this meant working closely and partnering with national and local stakeholders to define how water resources within their basins should be sustainably managed. In others, it meant empowering civil society organisations in their fight for rivers by mobilising legal experts, scientists, and artists willing to speak up about the need for conservation. Overall, this strengthened the commitment and efforts of civil society organisations, scientists, and legal practitioners.

## CASE STUDY 1: THE MUJIB – A NEW APPROACH TO RIVER BASIN GOVERNANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Introducing the concept of Integrated River Basin Management in Jordan, one of the world's most water-scarce countries was one of the greatest achievements of our partnership. The Mujib project took on this challenge, showcasing how an effective national-level committee for river basin management can be established by ensuring participation of all stakeholders.

Drawing on accumulated knowledge and investing in communication and capacity building were key activities supporting the implementation of this approach and the governance of the committee. Assessment of E-flow in particular, introduced to government authorities and then formally integrated in the management plan of the Mujib Biosphere Reserve, turned out to be a great success, and a win-win solution for both biodiversity conservation and water consumption.

This approach can also be applied in more complex basins in the country and in the Near East region.



Working in partnership, opened the doors for integrated river basin management in one of the most arid countries, case study of Mujib River, Jordan

## CASE STUDY 2: EUROPE'S FIRST WILD RIVER NATIONAL PARK - VJOSA/AOOS

The Vjosa/Aoos river flows freely for 270 km between Greece and Albania. Its tributaries create a mosaic of habitats rich in biodiversity. But this unique river system was threatened with destruction by plans for dozens of hydropower projects.

Between 2013 and 2022, the campaign to save Vjosa/Aoos saw growing support and action for river protection from local communities, scientists, lawyers, artists, NGOs and the media. And together, the organisations involved campaigned intensively in pursuit of a clear vision: to stop hydropower development and create Europe's first Wild River National Park (WRNP).

Numerous actions took place with more than 50,000 people supporting the campaign's vision. As a result, the Albanian Authorities and Patagonia signed a Memorandum of Understanding declaring their intention to establish the Vjosa WRNP, and Greece expressed support for granting protected status to unprotected stretches of the river in Greece. While the ultimate goal is a transboundary WRNP agreed between Albania and Greece, the currently achieved protection of the Vjosa/Aoos sends a vital message to Europe: think big and stop biodiversity and nature loss.



The dynamic part of the Vjosa River showing the habitat richness that would have been lost if the Kalivaç hydropower had been built  
© Nicolas Jehly

## KEY IMPACTS

The partnership produced high-impact outcomes in knowledge creation, threat mitigation, capacity building, awareness-raising, and community mobilisation across the Mediterranean Basin. This demonstrates that we are on track to deliver significant improvements in water management and the protection and restoration of river ecosystems in the region. Here are a few examples showcasing local and regional highlights from our work.

1. Several protection mechanisms for water-related ecosystems were initiated in cooperation with local and national authorities, including the permanent protection of four free-flowing rivers (Ćehotina and Bistrica in Montenegro, Krupa in Croatia, and Vjosa/Aoos in Albania/Greece), and the designation of 14 Ramsar sites and 1 Ramsar city (Ifrane) in Morocco.
2. New governance mechanisms were established, including the multi-sectoral IRBM committee for Mujib basin in Jordan, and an IRBM multi-sectoral committee for the Medjerda basin in Tunisia.
3. Restoration activities developed in cooperation with national authorities include the first example of lake restoration in Morocco (Aoua Lake), the restoration of the Hutovo Blato wetlands in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the identification of several priority stretches for river restoration through dam removal in Portugal (on the Arda, Odeleite, Sabor and Alviela rivers).
4. Knowledge on hitherto under-researched rivers in the Western Balkans was improved through the establishment of the Scientists for Balkans Rivers Network and three Science Weeks in Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina, providing novel insights on legal actions against hydropower development. For several river basins in Morocco, Jordan, and the Iberian Peninsula, innovative models and guidelines on minimum flow assessment were developed, taking into consideration best scientific knowledge.
5. In the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, a new law was passed that prohibits new permits for hydropower projects above 10 MW, thereby preventing the development of over 110 new dams and leaving 60 rivers free flowing. Consequently, concessions for the construction of new hydropower projects were banned in the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Montenegro (small hydropower), and in Portugal, the National Programme for Dams with High Hydroelectric Potential has been suspended.
6. Law enforcement for river protection was improved through regular action by the Lawyers for Rivers Network, with construction of more than 150 dams stopped, and two online training tools and two training programmes on environmental law for lawyers, judges, and prosecutors delivered in Portugal and Albania.
7. A sustainable finance mechanism for the protection and restoration of wetlands was initiated and tested in the Sebou Basin (Sebou Water Fund). So far, this fund has provided 15 projects in the Middle Atlas Region with technical and financial support.
8. Our awareness-raising campaign on the importance of river protection and restoration reached over 2.5 million people.
9. Three European Rivers Summits were organized in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Portugal, and Brussels, strengthening the European community of river protectors.
10. The strengthened Mediterranean Alliance for Wetlands will ensure the continuation of joint work for the protection and conservation of wetlands and river-related ecosystems.



## 4. WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT

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Partner organisations are committed to being the voice of wetlands and rivers in the Mediterranean and advocating for their conservation. And the joint efforts and learnings of the partnership will continue under the auspices of the [Mediterranean Alliance for Wetlands \(MAW\)](#), a network of civil society organisations and research institutes dedicated to showcasing best practice on wetland conservation and restoration, inspiring action, stimulating policy dialogue, sharing knowledge, building capacity, and empowering local communities and local and regional decision-makers.

Our experience has shown that to enable better management of natural resources and ensure healthy ecosystems that support community livelihoods and biodiversity, we must bring together governments, private sector actors, civil society organisations, and local communities. That is why we have also developed the [Wetlands 4 Mediterranean resilience](#) fundraising initiative. This builds on our field project experience and aims to replicate and scale solutions at landscape level through multi-stakeholder partnerships.

We have already secured funding for the coordination of the MAW, as well as for some local projects such as the restoration of Dayet Aoua Lake, in Morocco, and the establishment of the Vjosa Wild River National Park, in Albania. We anticipate further funding opportunities to arise and are actively exploring additional sources of funding for other local and regional activities.

*“Ifrane is a Ramsar city, and I would like to dedicate this achievement to MAVA Foundation who supported us in the protection and restoration of Sebou Wetlands.”*

Khadija Ait Kaddour, Chief of Department of Environment  
Province of Ifrane, Morocco

*“The work of this program in Balkan Rivers resulted in the creation of a strong network of NGOs. It opened the space for Patagonia to lock in some of the progress, as in Vjosa, while hoping to work with other committed partners to protect the Balkans' free-flowing rivers and truly wild places.”*

Ryan Gellert, CEO of Patagonia



