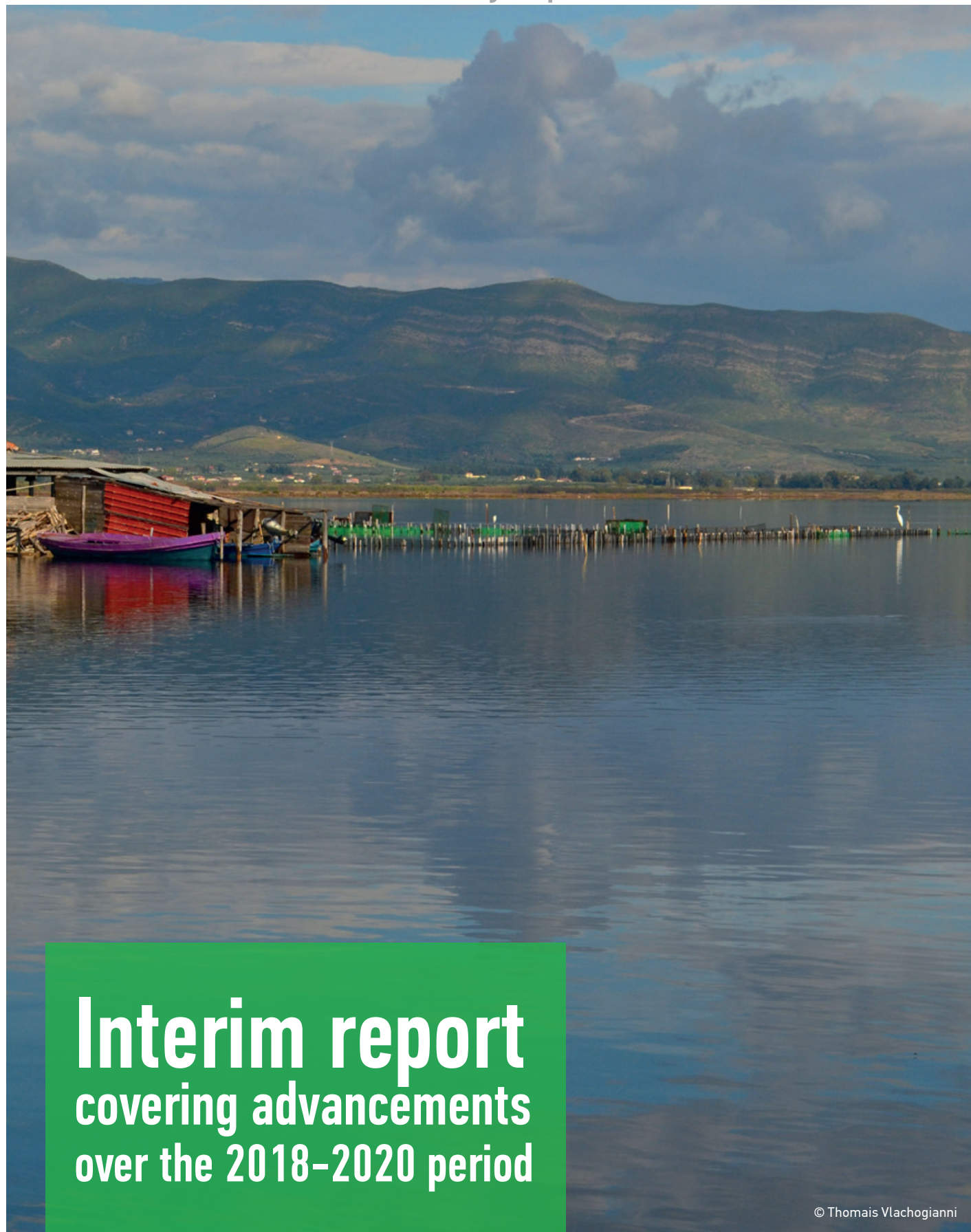


MIO-ECSDE Accountability Update



Interim report covering advancements over the 2018–2020 period

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The Mediterranean Information Office
for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development



The Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE), is a non-profit Federation of 133 Mediterranean Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working in the fields of Environment and Development in 28 countries of the Euro-Mediterranean area. The Federation's Secretariat is based in Athens, in the old and historic district of Plaka.

Our mission is to protect the Natural Environment and Cultural Heritage and promote Sustainable Development in the Mediterranean by bringing together the efforts of environmental and developmental NGOs. The ultimate goal of MIO-ECSDE is to promote Sustainable Development in a peaceful Mediterranean.



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FOREWORD



BY THE CHAIRMAN OF MIO-ECSDE

MIO-ECSDE is committed to the 12 Accountability Commitments and is systematically striving to improve its policies, activities and operations to be fully in line with this dynamic accountability framework.

The 2017 reporting process and the feedback by the Accountable Now Review Panel provided us with an excellent opportunity to critically reflect and improve our approach.

MIO-ECSDE procedures were revisited and more clear-cut policies were developed: Anti-corruption policy, gender policy, complaint policy and whistle blower policy. In addition, although MIO-ECSDE's approach to minimizing environmental impact was viewed as a good practice by the Panel, a comprehensive environmental policy was developed and a CO2 offsetting system was established.

At the level of the Secretariat, efforts were also undertaken to strengthen the sense of community within the MIO-ECSDE network by enhancing cooperation between the MIO-ECSDE Secretariat and its member organizations and by enhancing MIO-ECSDE's visual identity and its communications approach.

We look forward to continuing on the journey to learn and improve as a member of *Accountable Now*.

Prof. Michael J. Scoullos
January 2021



INTRODUCTION

MIO-ECSDE advanced from affiliate to full member of Accountable Now in 2018 after submission and approval of its first Accountability report. The report followed the new “Accountable Now” reporting framework and the 12 Accountability Commitments of the Global Standard for CSO Accountability. It addressed the year 2017 and included self-identified areas for improvement and key actions for next few years.

This Interim Report gives a progress update for the years 2018, 2019 and 2020 on significant accountability advancements and challenges that occurred during this reporting period and on aspects highlighted in the Improvement Analysis

provided by the Independent Review Panel in late 2018. Undoubtedly progress has been achieved but there are still accountability aspects that need further work over the 2021-2022 period (highlighted in green throughout the report).

The delay in submitting this interim report is in part due to the limited human resources within the MIO-ECSDE Secretariat. At the same time however, there was an on-going extensive effort to advance accountability and transparency and it was difficult to determine an appropriate time to capture achieved progress. Of course, the disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic caused an even further delay.



More than
25 years
as a Federation of NGOs
working on Environment,
Culture and Development

1991
[Network]

1996
[Federation]

2021
[133 Members in
28 countries]

SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN THE ORGANIZATION DURING THE REPORTING PERIOD

MIO-ECSDE has not experienced any major changes in its structure or hierarchy since 2018. Its membership has increased by six more member organisations, while one UK-based member closed its offices due to Brexit (it will continue its work from a Greece-based branch which is also a member of MIO-ECSDE).

At its 25th Annual General Assembly on 22 December 2020, the Croatian seat of the Executive Bureau (EB), the only Mediterranean EU country not represented on the EB, became active bring-

ing the number of seats to 19 (one from each of the 3 founding members, one from each of the 9 EU Mediterranean countries, 7 from non-EU Mediterranean countries).

For two biennia in a row (2018-2019 and 2020-2021) MIO-ECSDE has been awarded with co-financed Operating Grants by the EU Life Programme (administered via a competitive and transparent procedure by the Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises - EASME). This is a direct acknowledgement of:

- the relevance of MIO-ECSDE's strategic plan for the EU's environmental and climate action policies, particularly in the Mediterranean context;
- MIO-ECSDE's contribution to shaping, developing or updating the EU's environmental and climate action policies;
- the organization's contribution to the implementation and enforcement of the EU's environmental and climate action policies and to their promotion in its Southern Neighbourhood;
- MIO-ECSDE's importance in addressing new and emerging environmental and climate-related issues; and
- the potential of becoming an even more efficient stakeholder in the EU's policy process, including in aspects relating to transparency and accountability.



MIO-ECSDE has formulated a first draft of its Theory of Change which however is still under an internal consultation process that will be taken to the Executive Bureau and the membership.



Reacting to the COVID-19 pandemic

For the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, MIO-ECSDE, like most organisations, was affected by delays in administrative and financial procedures of its various donors and funding bodies. An ad hoc on-line Executive Bureau meeting (68th) took place on 5 May 2020 to confirm that the Executive Bureau authorizes the Chairman of MIO-ECSDE to partially redeem the MIO-ECSDE security fund, in the case that payment of expected funds from various MIO-ECSDE projects and funders were delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Before having to mobilise the release of the fund, pending payments came through, securing the full/regular operation of the Secretariat and its work programme for several months. However, it may be that the MIO-ECSDE Secretariat will have to revert to the decision taken at the 68th Ad Hoc EBM, in light of the global economic uncertainty, with a continued pandemic, potential resurgence in the winter months and staggering post-COVID challenges that will certainly affect the Mediterranean.



The MIO-ECSDE Secretariat worked remotely as soon as lockdown conditions were imposed in Greece in March 2020 due to the pandemic. In May, as restrictions became less strict, staff members were coordinated on a weekly basis, so that those who wished to also work from the office, were able to do so, on a rotational basis. Hygiene protocols, 2-meter distancing of work stations and other provisions as dictated by the health authorities were set in place, as well as an adaptation of the MIO-ECSDE travel procedure by which any staff member who wished to travel (either for work or for personal reasons) would have to take a direct flight even if more expensive (to minimize exposure risk) and self-quarantine for at least seven days upon return.

All of the running projects were gradually adapted to accommodate alternatives to replace physical meetings requiring air travel, or activities that did not align with social distancing, while the Secretariat constantly assessed the global, regional and national state of play, to see how the relaxation of



measures was advancing, double-back actions taken, forecasts of the scientific, political and business community, etc. Several projects very soon were granted 3 to 6-month extensions. Overall, MIO-ECSDE proved to have the required adaptability and flexibility to maintain a full work programme. No staff had to be laid off and even new staff was hired in 2020. However, remote coordination of all the staff as well as of the activities is proving to be a challenge, alarmingly increasing the time spent in front of laptop and desktop screens.

Activities that could support the Mediterranean environmental NGO community were boosted with budget re-allocated from travel and meeting costs that never took place (e.g. open call for proposals for the 2020 Mediterranean Action Day dedicated to marine Natura 2000 sites and other coastal and marine protected areas), while at Secretariat level, not only was all staff maintained without reductions in salaries, but one new junior policy officer was hired and external expertise (short term contracts) was strengthened, in an

effort to actively contribute to alleviating the socio-economic implications of the pandemic.

Several COVID-19 recovery plans have been announced by the regional and national institutions and political processes that the MIO-ECSDE work programme is linked with (European Union, Union for the Mediterranean, Mediterranean Action Plan of the United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, financing institutions, governments and agencies, etc.). Some of these are development plans designed before the pandemic and restructured to include COVID-19 lines, while others are newly designed initiatives for building resilience to and fighting socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. Environment and sustainability objectives, although mentioned are not adequately integrated at operational level opening a new set of actions that need to be taken by MIO-ECSDE and its members for a green and fair, carbon-neutral recovery.

PROGRESS UPDATE BASED ON IMPROVEMENT ANALYSIS

[A2] Key strategic indicators for success

Our overall assessment of the effectiveness of our work programme over this reporting period is very satisfactory. It is very encouraging that we were able to secure the needed co-financing for our annual work programmes well before the end of each year, including for the very uncertain 2020. Being the only umbrella Federation of NGOs, acting on the Mediterranean North-South Interface, with a synthesis of diverse NGO members operating under different regimes and conditions, MIO-ECSDE always has to deal with the reality of handling many different themes and addressing apart from the EU many different Intergovernmental Organizations, Conventions and bodies. We are confident that we have delivered a lot, addressing real needs and gaps, and have performed well. The performance survey that was sent very widely to our members confirms this (see E1 and H2), as do various formal and informal acknowledgements of partners, beneficiaries, donors and other stakeholders.

When applying for the operating grants to support NGO networks working on environment and climate action (EU LIFE programme), MIO-ECSDE submits a proposal detailing its biennial work programme, including overall and specific objectives and related expected results and indicators to monitor progress and impact. It submits a report at the end of each year against these indicators. Still, **MIO-ECSDE needs to establish a more comprehensive approach to measuring overall longer-term impact and directly linking to our objectives and strategic indicators of success.**

PROGRESS UPDATE BASED ON IMPROVEMENT ANALYSIS



Outputs and results linked directly to the activities carried out by MIO-ECSDE are measured at activity level using:

- performance indicators such as: number of position papers and other advocacy actions, media outputs and outreach, events and stakeholder consultations held, co-organizers mobilized, resources produced, target audiences/persons reached, number and type of stakeholders participating, feedback received, outreach, evaluation survey results, budget planning and implementation, number and type of participation in EU, UN and other expert groups, etc., and
- impact indicators such as: number of EU, Mediterranean and national level policies, plans, strategies and laws influenced and/or adopted (e.g. banning single-use plastics); number of policy reforms as a result of MIO-ECSDE capacity building activities; behavioural changes following educational and awareness raising actions. MIO-ECSDE relatively easily assesses the impacts at the activity level, however, long-term impact on the protection status of the natural environment and cultural heritage of the Mediterranean is difficult for MIO-ECSDE and similar organisations to assess or claim sole ownership of.

PROGRESS UPDATE BASED ON IMPROVEMENT ANALYSIS

The main immediate results/deliverables that are planned to be achieved through MIO-ECSDE's 2020-2021 strategy/agenda covered by its EU LIFE Programme operating grant are:

- new or updated position papers, policy briefs, statements, etc. (~10) as important media for influencing EU policy development and implementation, national policies and action plans in the EuroMediterranean Area and for streamlining EU priorities into other sectors and into Neighbourhood partner countries.
- more than 6 policy related meetings (ranging from international and regional scale to national or even sub-national relevance) and around 10 awareness raising and educational events that contribute to deeper comprehension and policy implementation. These are co-organised with other key stakeholders.
- more than 3 capacity building trainings and workshops on environmental priorities of the EU and 2-3 e-learning courses. MIO-ECSDE members as well as non-members will benefit from these.
- at least 6 high caliber, targeted publications (printed and soft format) and information materials directly or indirectly promoting EU priorities.
- at least 2 online surveys targeted to the MIO-ECSDE membership to: (i) detect new emerging environmental issues and identify emerging policy priorities, (ii) assess MIO-ECSDE performance.
- at least 50 news releases and linked promotional actions dedicated to MIO-ECSDE activities, outputs and achievements. Through the 128+ MIO-ECSDE member NGOs and four other networks it supports (MPs, Journalists, Educators and Universities) the outreach is potentially significant (in the millions).
- at least 5 new member organizations.
- 1 participatory science campaign on marine litter in the Mediterranean to address the data gaps;
- over 60 representations in important meetings leading to significant contribution to influencing the environmental and sustainable development agenda.
- a better capacitated Secretariat and Membership on running issues, but also in new and emerging ones.
- an even more transparent, accountable and better functioning of the Secretariat of MIO-ECSDE and of its member organisations.

Main medium- and long-term results:

- Improved MIO-ECSDE policy impact and involvement in policy development through improved quality and efficiency of MIO-ECSDE's work and enhanced accountability towards the Membership leading to increased credibility of MIO-ECSDE and its member NGOs.
- Environment NGOs and particularly MIO-ECSDE members are more effective partners in implementing EU regional and national policies, in drafting and running projects, etc. Synergies, coalitions and networks are strengthened at regional and national level.
- Improved MIO-ECSDE fundraising effectiveness and financial sustainability.
- Further enhanced and deepened partnership within the MIO-ECSDE network.
- Enhanced MIO-ECSDE function as sensor of environmental and/or climate related emerging issues and new policy priorities.
- Increased political will for the promotion of environmental protection and sustainable development in the European and Mediterranean countries, reflected in EU, regional and national policies, initiatives, strategies and funding schemes.

Examples illustrating the challenge in monitoring our impact:

A training co-organised by MIO-ECSDE in Rabat on the 16th of December 2019, entitled “**Mediterranean Coastal Wetlands and Nexus nature-based solutions in times of climate change**”. 20 Mediterranean journalists and 45 NGOs participated. It aimed to equip journalists and civil society with a deeper understanding of climate change challenges in the Mediterranean and coastal wetlands’ crucial contribution in mitigating climate change impacts through nature-based solutions, and reinforcing coastal communities’ resilience while protecting biodiversity. The 20 journalists followed-up with 38 articles, videos and photo coverage and numerous blogs, social media posts, etc. after they returned to their countries. This and the evaluation results of the training indicted the success of the activity, but what the impact of these and follow-up articles or the increased capacities of the 65 trainees in their countries is beyond MIO-ECSDE’s capacity to monitor.

MIO-ECSDE technically supports the work of the Mediterranean Committee on Education for Sustainable Development (the body that guides and monitors the implementation of the Action Plan of the Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development – MSED). It raised the funds and undertook the logistical and technical responsibility of bringing together some 80 stakeholders (officials from Ministries of Education and Ministries of Environment, educators of all levels including academia, NGOs, etc.) from 20 Euro-Mediterranean countries on 24-26 June 2019 to report on **the region’s collective progress** and share the valuable lessons learned in implementing the Action Plan of the MSED since the last meeting in 2017. The Strategy and its corresponding 5-year Action Plan (counting from the end of 2016) are instrumental towards enabling all people to develop knowledge, skills, values and behaviours necessary for making sustainable development a reality, and undertake concrete actions for a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature. Achievements ranged from national plans, strategies, programmes and projects related to ESD and the Sustainable Development Goals. Challenges, gaps and needs were identified, as were next steps. Practically all performance indicators for the activity were met (measurable and qualitative) but it is not certain if MIO-ECSDE will be able in the longer term to attribute progress in countries (knowledge, skills, values and behaviours) to this and similar efforts.

The results of the on-line survey that ran in late 2018 and early 2019 to collect its Membership’s and collaborating/associated networks’ inputs and insights in a systematic way with regards to emerging issues and emerging policy priorities were clear: ‘Plastic Pollution and associated issues’ was the top-ranking issue. A big part of the MIO-ECSDE activities are thus directly or indirectly linked with circular economy (with a green and fair basis), plastics minimization and sustainable consumer behaviour.



[C4] Healthy Planet

MIO-ECSDE was invited by *Accountable Now* to co-deliver, on October 2nd 2019, a webinar with participants from all around the globe, entitled: “Take action, improve and change: how CSOs can become accountable to the environment” (*Accountable Now*’s third commitment). The webinar addressed the questions of “what does accountability towards the environment look like for a civil society organisation? How can a CSO begin its journey towards protecting the environment?” and covered the basics in formulating an environmental policy and provided tips to help improve existing environmental practices, and minimize those that have a disproportionately negative impact on the environment. See the webinar here: <https://bit.ly/2ULYcgq>. Several MIO-ECSDE member organisations also benefited from the webinar.

Following this experience and although MIO-ECSDE’s approach to minimizing environmental impact was viewed as a good practice by the Panel, a comprehensive environmental policy was developed and a CO2 offsetting system was established. In terms of CO2 offsetting, the policy dictates that for the staff flights, the carbon offset will be done individually to create an environmentally conscious culture in the office. For the flights of the participants to MIO-ECSDE’s events, the carbon offset is made centrally by the financial officer. Exceptionally, and due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the policy could not be tested individually as all flights ceased. Nevertheless, the Secretariat decided to offset, centrally, the carbon emissions from the staff flights in the year 2019, which accounted for 22 tonnes, and received a [certificate from Gold Standard](#).



[B2] Lessons learned in the reporting period

- Assessing the impact of MIO-ECSDE's work continues to be a challenge and it will and should remain "work in progress".
- MIO-ECSDE acknowledges that its efforts to engage its members has not been as successful as hoped for. Approximately 37% of the membership is truly active, indicated by replies/reactions to the Secretariat's calls, invitations, and requests, the payment of fees, the less than anticipated participation in surveys and events, etc.). Although this is nothing new to networks and federations, **the Secretariat is planning a differentiated approach for 2021-2022.**
- Despite 2020 being a particularly disruptive year for the Mediterranean, MIO-ECSDE proved to be adaptive, flexible and resilient, remaining robust and concluding the year with yet another impressive set of achievements to report on (see [Report of Activities for 2020](#)). The active membership had a key role to play in this too. In the words of the members themselves, Patrizia Bonelli representing the Italian members said at the 25th AGM "we will try to always have close links with MIO-ECSDE as it is a guarantee for our accountability". Vjeran Pirsic from Eko Kvarner, Croatia shared how the small amount of funds received under MIO-ECSDE's open call for Med Action Day 2020 had a great impact in the preservation of the last 35 *Pinna nobilis* (noble pen shell or fan mussel – a large species of Mediterranean clam) in his island. Marie Therese Seif of HEAD, Lebanon, thanked MIO-ECSDE for its unplanned contribution to her organization's efforts to restore homes that were affected by the destructive Beirut port blast in August 2020.

MIO-ECSDE and/or the projects it is implementing are mentioned in most targeted key Mediterranean reports and proceedings (Union of the Mediterranean, Mediterranean Action Plan of the United Nations Environment Programme, State of the Environment and Development in the Mediterranean (SoED 2020), etc.)

COVID-19 transforms this year's Summer University on the Management of Biosphere Reserves and other designated areas into a 'hybrid' activity

With a second wave of the pandemic a reality, our Summer University dedicated to the newly established Biosphere Reserve of Asterousia in Crete, originally planned for September 2020, was postponed and reformulated. Only a few participants from Crete were part of a short first phase in October which, however, provided valuable visual material, for the second phase, from activities on the ground, contacts with local people, etc. More emphasis was given to the second on-line training phase of the course that followed in December, running asynchronously over a three-week period with weekly "Meet the Experts" sessions. The course was designed, taking into consideration the evaluation results and feedback from previous similar trainings, to offer a co-learning "space" in which experiences, lessons-learned and innovative practices are exchanged and elaborated. More than 200 trainees and trainers from 48 countries participated with about two thirds of the trainees being actively engaged. The training was implemented in cooperation with the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, the Development Agency of Heraklion and the Region of Crete. Read more [here](#).

Some testimonials of participants:

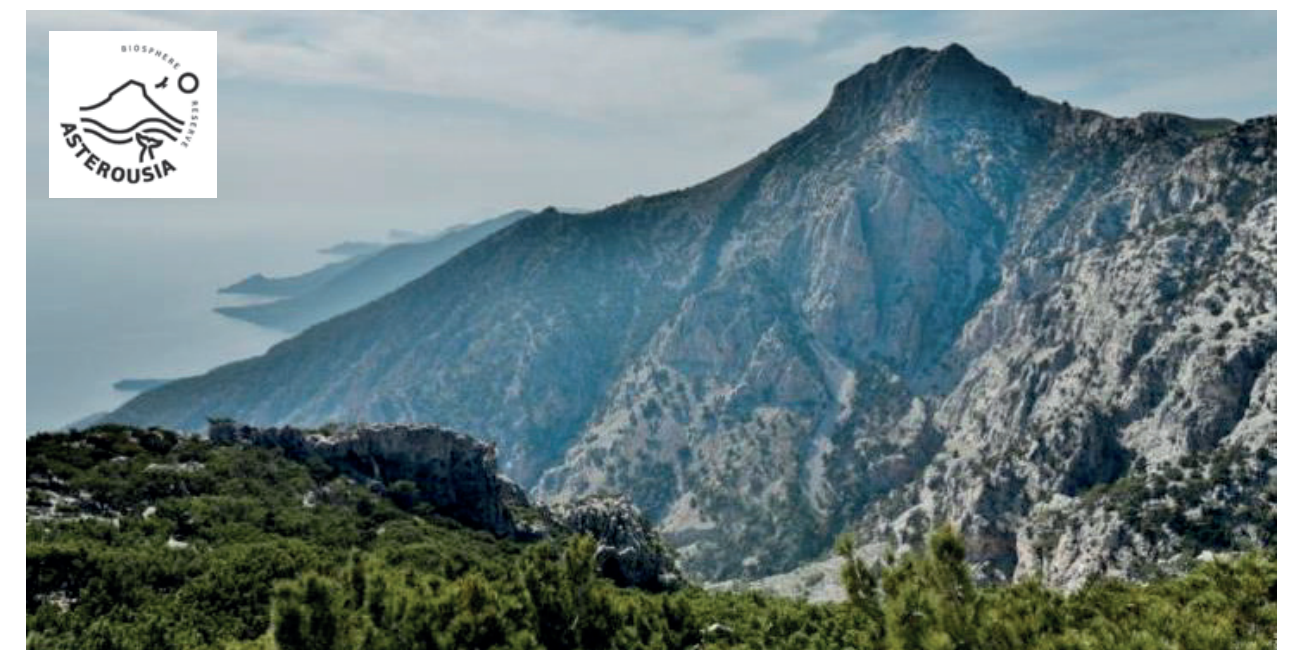
“ Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be a part of this course. I am totally grateful. This course has been a great eye opener to me and I have learned a lot. ”

“ Thank you all so much for this inspiring opportunity and for all your hard work pulling it together. It has really lifted me to a new level of passion for my work. ”

“ It was really an exciting journey for me! ”

“ The course is excellent, with much more insight than I estimated in the beginning! It is an inspiration source for my teaching techniques. I will definitely recommend the course to my (university) students! ”

There was not only positive feedback: some frustration with technical glitches of the platform and also with the absence within the course of some sensitive aspects such as locating wind turbines as a renewable energy alternative in protected areas.





[C2] Inclusivity, human rights, women’s rights and gender equality

[G2] Pay scale, gender pay gap and top salaries

MIO-ECSDE has always been committed to promoting gender equality and mainstreaming in its operations and in the Mediterranean region. Being a member of *Accountable Now* made us realise how we can improve in this and a MIO-ECSDE [Gender Policy](#) was developed for a cohesive and coordinated approach. The policy defines MIO-ECSDE’s explicit commitments to support gender equality and women’s empowerment within its own operations. **The next step is to lay the proper groundwork to properly monitor implementation of the new policy (specific guidance to staff, including indicators).**

In the 2018-2020 period, the female members of the Executive Bureau have increased from 21% to 34%, to 32 %.

In terms of human rights, they are at the core of Sustainable Development and therefore intrinsically part of MIO-ECSDE values. They are addressed as such in our Statutes, [Code of Conduct](#), the ISO 9001:2015 standards (design, development, management and implementation of international and European projects on environment and sustainable development) and in the new complaint and whistleblower policies where any harassment or physical/psychological/sexual abuse should be reported (more details in section: Complaints handling mechanisms and overview of complaints (internal and external (J3)). Furthermore, being a Mediterranean Federation, MIO-ECSDE’s scope of work covers many nationalities and ethnicities.

Youth empowerment and meaningful engagement in the Sustainable Development agenda in the Mediterranean has always been, like gender issues, horizontal to MIO-ECSDE activities, particularly linked to skills building, tertiary education curricula, young man-

There is no gender pay gap within MIO-ECSDE, while pay scales are as follows:



agers of protected areas, etc. The emerging employment opportunities within a ‘green recovery’ from COVID-19 is in the focus currently. Gender equality and youth inclusion was promoted via the 2020 Mediterranean Action Day (MAD), an annual activity of MIO-ECSDE that gives the opportunity to MIO-ECSDE member organizations and other NGOs to act in the field and be more visible to their target populations while at the same time tackle a frontline environmental issue of their municipality, region or country. The MAD 2020 focused on the importance of marine Natura 2000 sites and other coastal and marine protected areas. Youth inclusion and gender mainstreaming were among the proposal selection criteria and the final report will reflect this when compiled. In total, 10 activities were approved and implemented till the end of 2020, 5 of them were led by male experts and 5 by female experts.

Women and youth play an important role in the management of water and other natural resources as well as in promoting sustainable consumption patterns and responsible consumer behaviour. However, in the North African and Middle Eastern countries, policies in these fields rarely address women or youth. Under one of the international projects MIO-ECSDE participates in (EU-funded “Water and Environment Support” (WES) project 2019-2023), the opportunity arose to develop a WES Gender and Youth Action Plan to provide input on how WES can integrate gender and youth considerations in a practical, strategic and effective manner throughout its implementation. A desk study reviewing the gender

and youth situation (legal and institutional framework – and its implementation) in Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia took place complemented by two surveys to map (a) priority issues, needs and expectations in environmental and water-related matters, (b) possible synergies with organizations working on environmental and water issues, as well as (c) ways to strengthen and shape the environment and water agendas of organizations through the WES project. The surveys were sent in English, French and Arabic (native language of most recipients) to 185 women and 137 youth organizations. The report and Action Plan are under finalization (although it will remain a living document) but the aim is to circulate it as widely as possible once completed, so as to be of use not only internally to the project but also to the organisations that participated in the surveys, as well as the national administrations, EU Delegations, donor organisations and other projects.

We have not systematically addressed disability aspects: On the one hand MIO-ECSDE has developed environmental educational programmes for the hearing impaired ([Rainwater Harvesting Program “The Gift of Rain” for deaf and hard of hearing students](#)), run projects and developed resources on diversity and inclusion ([DIVE-IN: A guidebook of guidebooks for Diversity & Inclusive pedagogies](#)), includes accessibility in meeting venue selection criteria, but on the other, there is no comprehensive guidance on the issue neither to our staff nor to our membership.



[C3] Minimizing negative impacts on stakeholders

We take heed to not compete with our primary stakeholders, our members, particularly in our home base, Greece. In order to not compete for the limited resources available in-country, our agendas are rather clearly delineated. Furthermore, to not overshadow our Greek members, we purposefully do not ‘aggressively’ communicate our work and maintain a clear international identity with English as our working language. This is actually one of the reasons why in many ways MIO-ECSDE is more known outside of Greece than within. By decree, we act as a platform of cooperation, addressing gaps and building bridges among stakeholders. Institutional know-how and memory serve to include in project and activity design the minimization of negative impacts on stakeholders.

Admittedly, MIO-ECSDE can benefit from a more comprehensive approach for assessing and mitigating unintended impacts of projects, or efforts to support rather than compete with local organizations. This will be addressed where applicable within existing practices, processes and policies over the next biennium.



[E1] Stakeholder feedback

In view of MIO-ECSDE’s 30 years of existence and uninterrupted operation, and 25 years of work in its present format as a Federation of Environmental and Cultural NGOs aiming to protect the Natural Environment and Cultural Heritage and promote Sustainable Development in a peaceful Mediterranean, all MIO-ECSDE members received in January 2020 an e-survey (in [English](#) and [French](#)) with the aim to assess how MIO-ECSDE has performed and how it can perform better. To better engage the members, the survey was made in an interactive manner using the surveysparrow platform. By May 2020, the results were consolidated. In total 38 organizations participated in the survey, with a response rate of 29.2%. Out of the respondents 92% are Full Members with an almost equal North-South geographic distribution. The completion rate was 89.4% (34 out of 38 were fully completed). The findings confirm that the members are overall satisfied by the performance of MIO-ECSDE (namely in issues related to representing the membership in regional political platforms, including them in the capacity building activities MIO-ECSDE organizes through the joint projects it runs, keeping them up-to-date on developments through its websites and social media platforms, etc.). A few Members indicated that they need more systematic information on proposed follow up actions after major regional Mediterranean meetings (UNEP/MAP, UfM, etc.) to stimulate local activities. More effort for regional projects involving the membership was also requested of the MIO-ECSDE Secretariat.

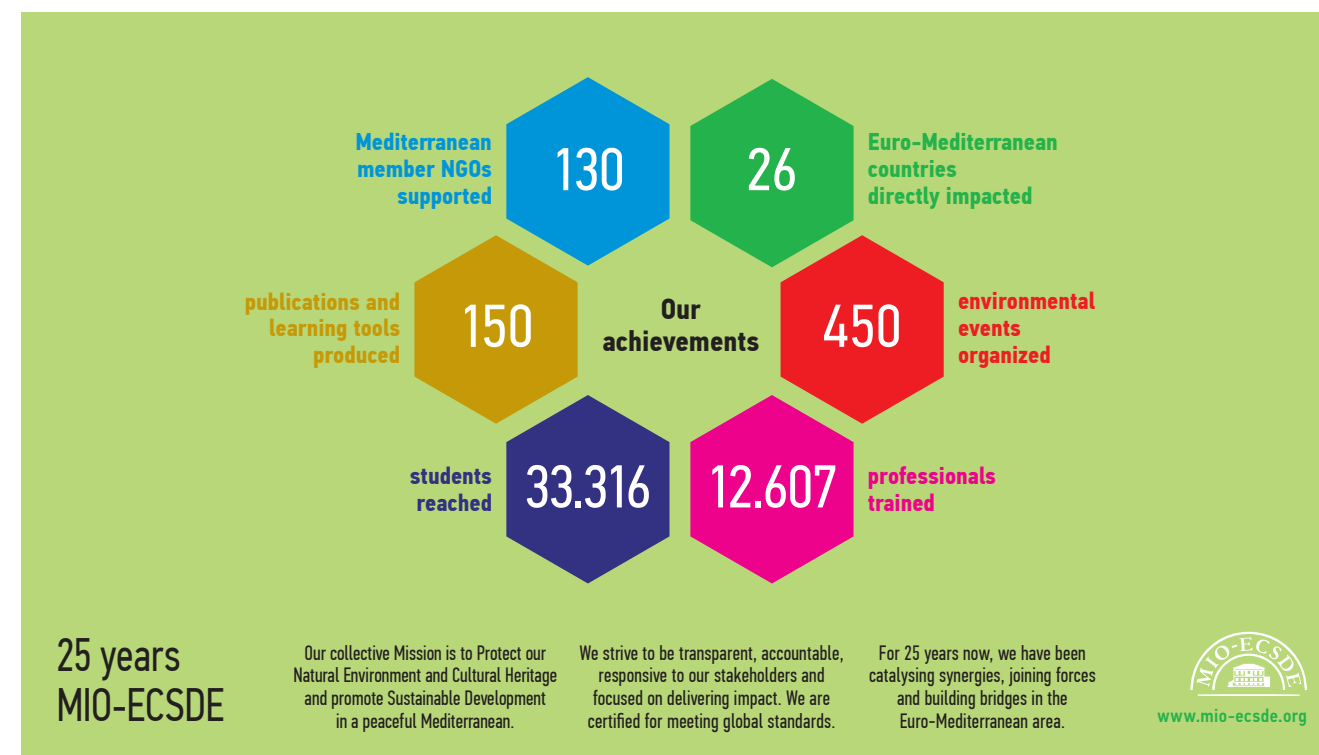
The Secretariat already in 2020 made an effort to address the feedback received and by 2021, relevant internal procedures will be put in place. The non-renewal of the contract of the Communications Officer in December 2020 may however delay progress as there will be at least a 3-month position gap and an adaptation period for the new recruit.

Questionnaires are important for feedback but response rates are almost always lower than anticipated particularly during this period impacted by COVID-19 and fatigue in responding to e-questionnaire requests. Keeping them short or designing them in a more conversational format did not lead to an increase in completed surveys. MIO-ECSDE will keep looking for more engaging methods or platforms although the direct person-to-person approach (resources and time permitting) is the best approach.

In the past, as part of our ISO 9001:2015 standards in the design, development, management and implementation of international and European proj-

ects on environment and sustainable development, we requested satisfaction questionnaires on an annual basis from our key partners and donor agencies. But this was not continued as it was too demanding on the targeted bodies and not as productive as one-on-one informal discussions (either dedicated or ad hoc in the sidelines of workshops and conferences). In addition, built-in monitoring mechanisms of projects and requested project closing letters provide satisfaction levels and feedback of donor agencies, while minutes of project steering committee meetings mention satisfaction levels of participating countries and partners (including constructive advice on next steps and sustainability aspects).

Funds permitting, external assistance on stakeholder aspects, including feedback facilitation is on the table.



[H2] Staff development and safe working environment

Although there is no staff survey, there are frequent planned and ad hoc staff meetings with the purpose of getting staff inputs and feedback. **In 2021 there are provisions for strengthened human resources dedicated to internal procedures, including more consistent and structured monitoring of staff performance, needs and feedback.** The current discussion-based annual staff evaluation method allows for suggested improvements from both sides. Nevertheless, taking up the advice of the Panel, MIO-ECSDE senior staff was trained in 2020 to be able to design and perform 360-degree feedback reviews. **A first approach will be implemented in 2021-2022 on a trial basis.**

Indicatively, 17 staff trainings were planned and implemented in 2019. They addressed wide ranging issues such as:

- GDPR;
- public procurement;
- accountability enhancement;
- bridging the grant/grantee gap;
- odour pollution;
- inclusive education (including for migrants and refugees);
- story telling for enhanced communication skills; etc.

Approximately 60% were considered impactful with the remaining proving to not be as relevant or applicable as expected. Three new junior policy officers were hired in 2020 to assist the existing staff in effectively addressing policy advances related to climate change, water and blue growth.

Funds were secured for a 2-day staff retreat in 2020 but due to COVID-19 restrictions and risks it did not take place. The same funds have been reserved for 2021.



[E2] Stakeholder engagement

[D2] Reaching out to those impacted or concerned by our work

[E3] Main likes/dislikes from stakeholders and organization’s response

The proposed MIO-ECSDE work programme of each year is shared with the members in advance and feedback is integrated when possible or noted for future opportunities (pending funds and capacity). At activity level feedback from the member organisations or from the Circles it supports is also sought. In 2019 the MEdIES network secretariat sent a [questionnaire](#) to its membership (approx. 6000 people) to co-create the network’s new website. The 42 responses helped make it a more user-driven website.

▶ [please see also Stakeholder Feedback E1]

At project level, activities are designed building on lessons learned and evaluation/satisfaction results of previous similar projects. An example is how the Water and Environment Support (WES) project (2019-2023) (MIO-ECSDE is a key consortium member) was designed based on two survey results of its predecessor project SWIM-H2020 Support Mechanism (2016-2019) where MIO-ECSDE was also a key partner. One was sent to the approx. 1300 direct beneficiaries of SWIM-H2020 SM in the last months of the project to measure satisfaction, follow-up, impact and proposed next steps, while the other was sent to the country focal points that oversaw the project activities with the aim of capturing sustainability aspects and corrective measures for any follow-up projects. The results directly fed into the inception phase of WES and, in fact, inception missions to the eight countries were decided as not needed, economizing both funds and CO2 emissions.

Another example of a smaller-scale effort to consider stakeholder inputs and needs was the design of a [survey](#) sent to all previous participants of our summer universities in order to develop the 2020 Asterousia Hybrid University. 21 contributions were received and taken into account.

Information on feedback and impact of MIO-ECSDE activities on secondary stakeholders, implemented by member or other NGOs, is collected via reporting mechanisms. For example, the reporting template for the Mediterranean Action Day is shared at the contracting phase and includes sections with guidance on Participants’ feedback:

- How do you measure participant satisfaction?
- Did you receive feedback from participants?
- Have you collected testimonials/feedback via a form or an application?
- Did participants express their interest in participating in similar activities in the future?
- Please share any results/metrics you may have).



[D2] Reaching out to those impacted or concerned by our work

In 2018 a questionnaire was sent to the member NGOs in an effort of MIO-ECSDE to:

- (a) renew its relations with all its members including those who hadn't been active or participated in the AGM meetings in the last years and
- (b) to understand their capacities, their constraints and the type of help they need from an organization such as MIO-ECSDE. The exercise proved beneficial in re-engaging with part of the less active membership.

Although the rate of replies was satisfactory for such types of surveys (29%), we would have liked to receive more replies in order to have a better understanding from all types/sizes of the member organizations. The findings confirmed that the MIO-ECSDE work program reflects the priorities and aspirations of the membership but also provided sufficient elements to guide future activities in support of our membership. A session of that year's AGM was dedicated to discussing the [findings](#).

MIO-ECSDE participates in member activities, provides expertise and support, and designs and submits joint projects with member organisations (see for example [SIDU-MEF](#)). Member NGOs, but also other NGOs of relevance with appropriate profiles, are invited to participate in capacity building and other activities under the frameworks of regional projects MIO-ECSDE is involved in, such as SWIM-H2020 SM, WES, Plastic Busters MPAs, etc.

In the Mediterranean region, the language barrier is one of the key challenges. In recent years, MIO-ECSDE has reached a point where it has the in-house capacity to deliver the majority of its resources in English and French, and many in Arabic and Greek.

ENG FR AR GR

The MEDIES network of educators:

- Keeps its members regularly updated while inviting them to share news, activities and updates through the MEDIES communication channels: social media, webpage, emails, news bulletins, etc.
- Applies top down and bottom up approaches and teams' reflective work in all joint activities, staying open to members' ideas, proposals, comments, etc.
- Brings together various stakeholders engaged in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD): from international organizations, to national focal points, from state and non-state actors, to individual educators.
- Cooperates with other networks e.g. UNESCO ASPNet schools, the Baltic University Programme (BUP), the YouthXchange initiative, etc.
- Applies a 'loose' structure in membership, keeping it easy-to-participate, open and non-binding.
- Applies experiential learning processes and at the same time promotes Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The format of educational resources is gradually shifting more and more to online versions (web apps, etc.), while capacity building activities are transformed or developed for online or hybrid delivery, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Organises activities (e.g. ESD trainings) at national/local level engaging its members and partner in the country, enhancing the sense of ownership. Many were the cases where members replicated or even scaled up MEDIES activities i.e. further trainings, re-production of educational resources, etc.



An example of how MIO-ECSDE reaches out to those impacted by environment and climate policy in the Mediterranean.

In view of the forthcoming 2nd UfM Ministerial Meeting on Environment and Climate Action, scheduled to take place in Egypt, a [UfM Online Stakeholder Consultation](#) was launched on the 22nd of July and remained active till the 31st of August 2020. MIO-ECSDE, through the EU-funded regional project “Water and the Environment Support (WES) in the ENI Southern Neighbourhood region”, provided expert support to the UfM Co-Presidencies in the design and implementation of the Stakeholder Consultation.

The aim of the consultation was to: provide the possibility to an even wider range of relevant actors to consult on the priority themes identified by the UfM countries that will feed the joint post-2020 Environment and Climate Action agenda; and maintain a meaningful participatory engagement of Mediterranean and other stakeholders in the formulation of relevant regional policy, common axes of work and joint actions.

The consultation’s questionnaire and supporting documentation was available in English, French, and Arabic. Stakeholders were invited to view, prior to completing the questionnaire, the [introductory themes, and priorities](#). For reference, the full version of the questionnaire is available in [English](#), [French](#), and [Arabic](#).

197 people from 29 countries participated in the online UfM Stakeholder Consultation. Of these, 165 completed all or most of the questions. The respondents’ gender profile was 50/50 with 110 replies provided in English, 35 in Arabic, and 20 in French.

WES support (through MIO-ECSDE) for this important consultation during a COVID-19 stricken period, was highly appreciated by the UfM, the European Commission, several Mediterranean governments and other regional stakeholders, as well as by the respondents themselves.

The participants represented a wide range of stakeholder groups: 25% were NGO representatives, 17% academia or research institutions, 9% ministries (environment, education, water, etc.), 9% international organizations, 7% other government agencies, 7% private sector, followed by donor institutions (2%) and local authorities (1%). The remaining 23% were various other types of stakeholders: intergovernmental bodies, media, parliamentarians, protected area managers, international projects, experts, educators, etc.

Overall, the results confirmed that the themes to be addressed under the UfM Environment and Climate Action agendas are highly relevant. The consultation gave the opportunity for a collection of valuable insights and additional ideas that can inform and inspire the next steps in the UfM’s agendas: from the prioritization of specific thematic areas, to how meaningful engagement of stakeholders is in the region and at country level; what stakeholders feel is needed to transition towards an inclusive green economy; how tools such as smartphone apps, satellites, remote sensing, etc., should be used more frequently, and much more.

On whether post-COVID-19 recovery in the Mediterranean can be linked to a more just, resilient, and climate-neutral economy, there is concern that the economic recovery will be prioritized over any social and environmental impacts and, as such, jeopardize the transition. Short-term environmental gains vs a complete rethink of the economy in terms of making it more sustainable and green are feared to be more likely. Read the full report in English [here](#).



[B1] Sustainability of our working

MIO-ECSDE has successfully sustained itself since 1991 guided by ‘doing the right things’ and ‘doing things right’ within well-defined external and internal factors that shape the environment within which it functions and by identifying the main stakeholders that affect its operation, aiming at better management of the organization and minimising risks. Bold actions have been taken but with contingencies in place. The whole process is a dynamic and feedback-based task, contributing to the continuous improvement/strengthening of its effectiveness and sustainability, and to decreasing/mitigating the risks that the organization may face, maximising strengths and reducing at the same time unavoidable challenges and weaknesses. Anything that could threaten the reputation, reliability, operation or viability of the organization and its activities is considered as a risk. The results of the 2020 [Operational Environment Analysis](#), based on internal and external factors affecting MIO-ECSDE’s operation and guiding how MIO-ECSDE addresses the challenges it faces can be found [here](#). The vast majority of MIO-ECSDE members has also shown a similar level of resilience and sustainability, in spite of the many challenges the region faced in recent years (Arab Spring, economic crises, natural disasters, wars).

Stakeholder engagement is part of the design, implementation and monitoring of MIO-ECSDE-led regional strategies, action plans and projects. An example of how this has been done and acknowledged in the case of the Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (MSESD) can be seen in a [UN factsheet](#) (an updated version is under preparation at the invitation of the United National Environment Programme/Mediterranean Action Plan). Furthermore, MIO-ECSDE has also developed resources to support other Mediterranean stakeholders to understand the importance of meaningful stakeholder engagement and acquire the capacity to plan and implement such processes, such as “[A handbook on the Public Participation Process in the Mediterranean](#)” (2015 – complemented by an e-course), “[Public Participation, Information and Awareness in the Mediterranean](#)” (2002), and [trainings](#) (2020), including how to do stakeholder mapping and analysis.



[D1] Key stakeholders and how they are identified

In terms of MIO-ECSDE members and potential members, the goal is to have a strong and engaging membership and remain relevant to their needs. The key steps in achieving this are:

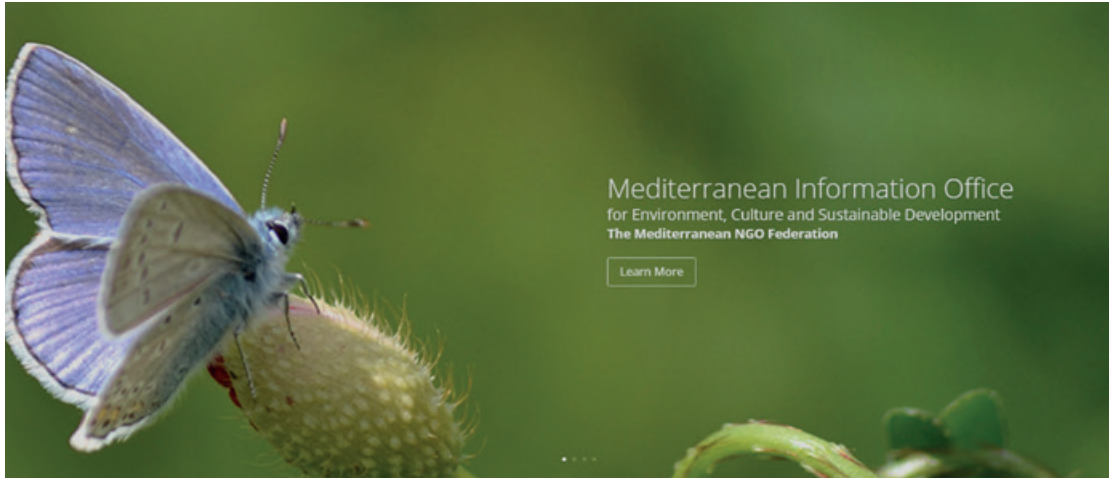
- Constant review of the current situation of civil society in the region working on environment, culture and sustainable development
- Review of members (performance, challenges, needs)
- Identification of leading players for future partnerships (projects, joint advocacy, etc.)
- Assessing the benefits for members
- Attracting / Approaching appropriate organizations to become new members (but also applying a scrutiny process at application phase)
- Enhancing the sense of identity of the members (increased sense of co-ownership of achievements)

[see also B1]

MIO-ECSDE reaches citizens and communities on the ground through its members, circles and partners. However, there are certain activities in which MIO-ECSDE directly addresses local stakeholders within communities. An example is the project “PLASTIC WASTE? Into the blue bin, away from the blue sea!”, which is run by MEIES (Circle of Educators) and aims to sensitize students, teachers and citizens of selected Greek Islands on marine litter with an emphasis on single-use plastics and to stimulate a behavioural shift away from the single-use mentality, combined with effective daily recycling practices. A holistic approach is applied and thus the specific objectives of the project are:

- To raise awareness of students on the state and impact of marine litter, especially plastics, as well as proper recycling;
- To train and enable their teachers to integrate the subject of marine litter threats and recycling into their teaching;
- To inform the local communities on the proper management of household waste especially plastics;
- To motivate all of the above to undertake responsible actions including avoiding single-use plastics, reusing, screening at source, proper recycling in the Blue Bin, joining cleanups, etc. at a household, school and community level;

In the long run the project is expected to increase the quantities of recycled materials and to reduce the landfilled waste on the islands. Activities include school visits and interventions by experienced trainers on minimising single use plastic and proper recycling; preparation and production of educational material for students and teachers; teacher training workshops; dedicated public sessions in collaboration with the local municipalities.



[G1] Availability of key policies

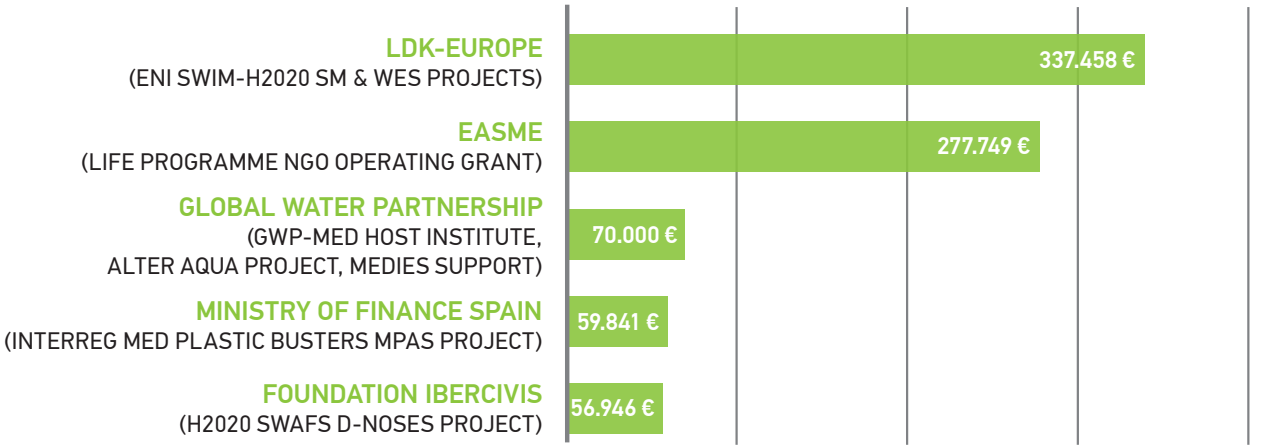
[G4] Information on our website

MIO-ECSDE developed the following [policies](#) over the past two years. They were approved by the Executive Bureau in September 2020 and also by the Annual General Meeting in December. They were uploaded soon after on the MIO-ECSDE website:

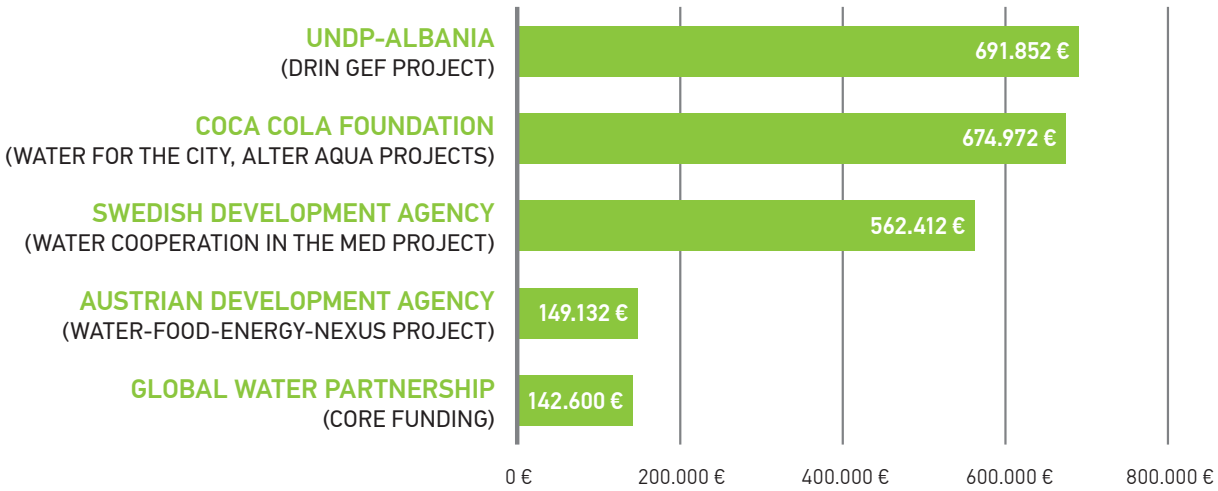
- The MIO-ECSDE [Anti-Fraud/Corruption Policy](#) (as well as an Annual Declaration to be signed annually by MIO-ECSDE’s staff members): Committed to maintaining a culture of zero-tolerance towards fraud and unethical activities that threaten the reputation of MIO-ECSDE, an Anti-Fraud/Corruption policy was developed defining what fraudulent and corrupt behaviour is considered by MIO-ECSDE and setting out steps to be taken to report fraud. MIO-ECSDE’s personnel are requested to declare annually that they have read and understood its Anti-Fraud/Corruption Policy and to declare any conflicts of interest so that they are appropriately registered.
- The MIO-ECSDE [Complaint Policy](#): To give the stakeholders the opportunity to hold the organization accountable, a complaint policy was developed outlining how complaints can be submitted and how they are handled. It deals exclusively with external complaints.
- Internal complaints and grievances from MIO-ECSDE’s Executive Bureau members, officers, other staff, volunteers and interns are managed according to MIO-ECSDE’s [Whistleblower Policy](#).
- The MIO-ECSDE [Environmental Policy](#).
- The MIO-ECSDE [Gender Policy](#).

As policies and procedures advance, the Code of Conduct of MIO-ECSDE is constantly updated and enriched.

5 major donors contributing to the 2019 MIO-ECSDE Work Programme



5 major donors contributing to the projects of the hosted entity GWP-Med



The development of a strategy document was put on hold at the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and is to be drafted over the 2021-2022 period. All milestone meetings (UN, Union for the Mediterranean, others) that would provide the ‘backdrop’ of a MIO-ECSDE strategy document and would have normally taken place in 2020, have been postponed to 2021 and some are expected to be postponed even further.

Concerning our largest donors and their contributions, below is information included in our 2019 Financial Statement and below are the 5 major donors of MIO-ECSDE projects for 2019 as well as the 5 major donors for projects implemented by our hosted entity Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean.



[J3] Complaints handling mechanisms and overview of complaints (internal and external)

During the reporting period, a complaint policy and a whistleblowing policy were developed (as mentioned previously) stating that employees should report unacceptable conduct relating to corruption, harassment or abuse, discrimination, or acts that do not comply with MIO-ECSDE's values and principles. Reports are made to the Chairperson and the Quality Assurance Officer, who are responsible for investigating and following up on incidents. In case the complaint involves them, it should be directed to the appointed Integrity officer (name and contact included within the policy).

There is provision of any complaints made and processes to be documented in an internal process automation software used for the overall quality management of the organization (eQual Suite). There have been no complaints made in the past 20 years (internally or externally). With a complaint and a whistleblowing policy in place, visible and accessible, we expect that the complaints process will be facilitated and **MIO-ECS-DE will report on any complaints made (nature and status) in future reports.**



[K1] The governing body and management are held accountable for fulfilling strategic promises

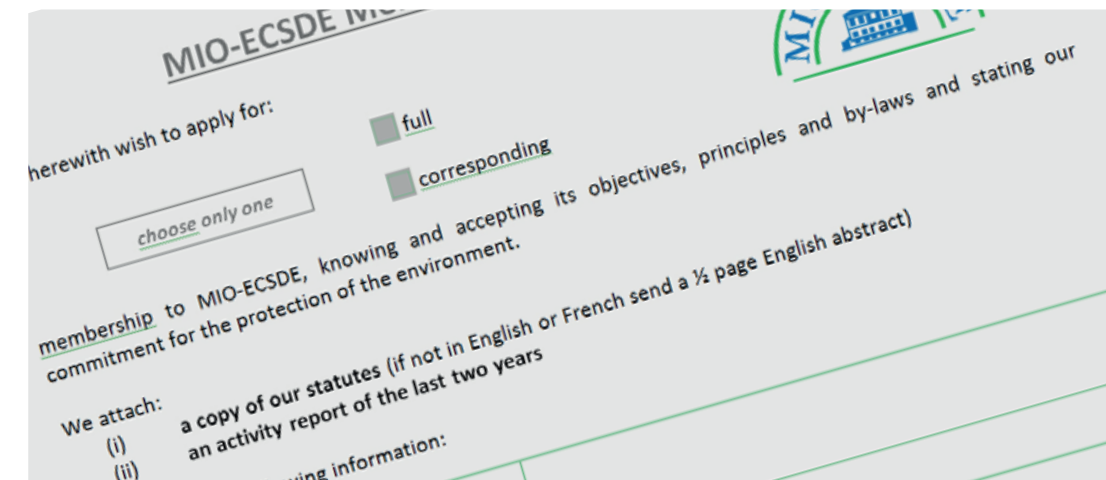
The Panel raises an interesting point that MIO-ECSDE takes note of, in terms of the performance assessment of the Chairperson and Executive Bureau. So far, the performance of the Secretariat under their guidance, as evaluated by the Annual General Assembly, by monitoring internal (KPIs) and external audit results, feedback from key stakeholders, the *Accountable Now* improvement analysis, reflection in the media, etc. has reflected upon both the Chairperson and the members of the Executive Bureau. The Chairperson, Co-Chairperson and Treasurer, although elected every two years, are confirmed every year, based on performance as reflected in the annual reports.

A more targeted/structured approach, as suggested by the Panel, is under consideration for the performance of the Executive Bureau.



[K2] Inclusion of staff in discussing progress toward organizational accountability

MIO-ECSDE's approach to the accountability reporting process is participatory, with Secretariat staff consulted for contributions and review of the draft report but also participation in internal policy development. The Panel's feedback was communicated via our [e-News](#) to our full e-mail database and uploaded on our website. It was discussed with staff, the Chairman and the Executive Bureau. This interim report and the progress described herein were co-developed and/or reported by various members of the Secretariat (both senior and junior).



[K3] Scope of this accountability report and influence over national entities

MIO-ECSDE can support its members by example, through capacity building opportunities and regular communication on NGO accountability and transparency. It organized a relevant training for 34 of its member organisations in October 2018, back-to-back with its AGM. Following the session, when the members were asked, based on what they had just learned about accountability, if they can honestly claim (and prove) to be accountable and transparent, the majority replied that they were not sure and that they definitely have to work on the matter more. Support from the *Accountable Now* Secretariat in the form of provision of expertise, guidance and resources would be highly appreciated so that MIO-ECSDE can address the needs.

If there are serious and valid indications of breach of the MIO-ECSDE values by members, then the issue of potential termination would be brought to the Executive Bureau and their proposal, in turn, to the AGM. To date, such a case has not been raised.

The Panel's feedback on the first report of MIO-ECSDE was shared with the Executive Bureau, posted on the MIO-ECSDE website and included in our first e-News that followed the Panel's feedback which is received by all the members of the Federation, its Circles, partners and wider network (see K2).



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