



EastMed

Report of the Eleventh Coordination Committee Meeting

1st February 2021

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Preface

The Project “Scientific and Institutional Cooperation to Support Responsible Fisheries in the Eastern Mediterranean- EastMed is executed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and funded by Italy and the EC DG MARE.

The Eastern Mediterranean countries have for long lacked a cooperation framework as created for other areas of the Mediterranean, namely the FAO sub-regional projects AdriaMed, MedSudMed and CopeMed II. This made it more difficult for some countries in the region to participate fully in international and regional initiatives for cooperation on fishery research and management. Following the very encouraging experience of technical and institutional assistance provided to countries by the other FAO sub-regional Projects,

EastMed

The project was born to support the development of regional cooperation and the further development of multidisciplinary expertise necessary to formulate appropriate management measures under the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the principles of the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) to ensure rational, responsible and participative fisheries management

The project’s **longer-term objective** is to contribute to the sustainable management of marine fisheries in the Eastern Mediterranean, and thereby to contribute to supporting national economies and protecting the livelihoods of those involved in the fisheries sector.

The project’s **immediate objective** is to support and improve the capacity of national fishery departments in the sub-region to increase their scientific and technical information base for fisheries management and to develop coordinated and participative fisheries management plans in the Eastern Mediterranean sub-region.

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Publications

EastMed publications are issued as series of Technical Documents (GCP/INT/363/EC – 041/ITA/TD-00) and Occasional Papers (GCP/INT/363/EC –041ITA/OP-00) related to meetings, missions and research organized by or conducted within the framework of the Project.

Occasionally, relevant documents may be translated into national languages as EastMed Translations (GCP/INT/363/EC– 041/ITA/ET-00)

Comments on this document would be welcomed and should be sent to the Project Headquarters:

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Preparation of this document

This document is the final version of the Report of the 11th Coordination Committee meeting of the EastMed Project, organized online by the FAO-EastMed Project (Scientific and Institutional Cooperation to Support Responsible Fisheries in the Eastern Mediterranean), 1st February 2021.

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ABSTRACT

The 11th Coordination Committee meeting of the EastMed project was held online on 1st February 2021. The meeting was attended by representatives from Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Lebanon, Turkey and Palestine, and by staff of the FAO Fisheries Division, FAO Regional Projects and the GFCM Secretariat. The main activities carried out by the project from November 2019 to January 2021 were presented, covering the four main project components: institutional strengthening; staff training and development; data collection and analysis; and increased participation and cooperation. The Committee discussed the ongoing changes in the provision of technical assistance and capacity development in the sub-region in view of the new mid-term strategy for the sustainability of fisheries in the Mediterranean. A plan of work for 2021 was agreed considering the priorities identified in the previous Coordination Committee meeting and the planned transition to new framework for technical assistance under the GFCM.

Report of the 11th meeting of the EastMed Coordination Committee

1st February 2021

Opening of the meeting

1. The eleventh meeting of the Co-ordination Committee of the FAO EastMed Regional Project “Scientific and Institutional Cooperation to Support Responsible Fisheries in the Eastern Mediterranean” was held online on February 1st, 2021.
2. The meeting was attended by representatives from Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Lebanon, Turkey and Palestine, and by staff of the FAO Fisheries Division, FAO Regional Projects AdriaMed, CopeMedII, EastMed and MedSudMed and the GFCM Secretariat. The list of participants is given in Annex I.
3. The meeting was opened by the Coordinator of the FAO-EastMed Project, who welcomed the participants on behalf of FAO. He also chaired the meeting.
4. The Agenda (Annex II) was presented to the Coordination Committee and adopted without changes.

Report on the Intersessional Activities

5. The project staff introduced this agenda item and the document “Report on the Intersessional Activities of the Project” EastMed CC11_02 (Annex III) in which the main activities carried out by EastMed from November 2019 to January 2021 were described. The activities carried out correspond to the prioritized work programme and recommendations of the 10th Meeting of the EastMed Coordination Committee.
6. In relation to the objective of institutional strengthening, the presentation highlighted the efforts made to mainstream the ecosystem approach to fisheries management through training courses and pilot studies. The workshop “Transition towards an ecosystem approach to fisheries in the Mediterranean: lessons learned through selected case studies” recently co-organized by FAO Regional Projects also gave an opportunity to evaluate the progress made and the challenges remaining for EAF implementation in the eastern Mediterranean. The presentation also highlighted the progress made with the assessment of vulnerability of fisheries to the effects of climate change and the ongoing preparation of a synthesis document that will additionally discuss the types of adaptation options available to cope with the main priority impacts. Finally, the presentation described the recent actions taken by the project to support the upgrading of the national fisheries information systems and IT infrastructure in Lebanon.
7. In relation to the objective of promoting staff training and development, the presentation described the series of online webinars, workshops and events that were organized by the

project, in collaboration with the other FAO Regional Projects and the GFCM, with a view to enhance knowledge on specific topics and methods of interest to the network of experts in the sub-region. The list of events included: Webinar on Local Ecological Knowledge based monitoring (June 2020); Online workshops on data-limited methods for the assessment of round sardinella (June-July 2020); Online workshop on Empirical Indicators for Fisheries Management Advice (October 2020); Online training workshop on the collection of data on by-catch, discard and vulnerable species with a focus on the identification of sharks, skates and rays in Cyprus (November 2020); and the Small-Scale Fisheries University Day (10 November 2020).

8. The presentation described the fisheries data collection activities supported by the project (Objective 3), including the biological data collection for priority species in Palestine, Lebanon and Turkey, the collection of catch, effort and socioeconomic data in Palestine, and the experimental surveys with small-scale fishing gears in Lebanon. It was noted that in all cases, activities could only be partially accomplished because of the restrictions and delays caused by the pandemic. The Committee was also informed of the advances made with the multi-disciplinary and sub-regional action led by the project to enhance knowledge on the stock of round sardinella in the eastern Mediterranean. The results of this action will contribute to the planned benchmark assessment of sardinella foreseen for May 2021.
9. The presentation finally described the different activities carried out to maintain a good level of collaboration, cooperation and communication with beneficiary countries, regional organization, donors and FAO, including bilateral meetings, missions (pre-Covid), publications and the maintenance of the project website.
10. The member of the Egyptian delegation thanked the project for the work carried out in past years to develop capacity on the ecosystem approach to fisheries, which made an important contribution to change the approach to fisheries management. He remarked the usefulness of the workshop to evaluate the progress and the challenges with the implementation of management plans in the different countries. He also supported the initiative to publish and disseminate the results of these experiences as an FAO Fisheries Technical Paper, which could be useful for other countries pursuing similar goals. He finally congratulated the project for the work carried out to assess the vulnerability of fisheries to climate change, which will contribute to the work plan approved by the SAC of the GFCM.
11. The representative from Lebanon additionally remarked on the value chain study conducted with partial support of the project in 2017, which provided various recommendations to build on in the future. He also mentioned the relevance of the work being carried out to upgrade the existing fishery information system (FLOUCA) to a new system based on the FAO-NFI *Calipso*. The information system to be developed will address a request from Lebanon but could also be a valuable tool for other countries in the sub-region. He finally noted that all the expertise and knowledge acquired with the support

of the project will be very useful for the ongoing FAO TCP project on illegal fishing in Lebanon.

12. The representative from Palestine reiterated the interest to develop a fishery information system similar to FLOUCA developed for Lebanon. The project informed that the work to upgrade the FLOUCA system in Lebanon is still in the early phases of development and that further steps will be taken in 2021 to progress with the new upgraded system. It was suggested to wait until the system is developed and tested before deciding to implement a similar system in other areas. The project also agreed to find ways to share the experience with this initiative along the process of development of the new system, for instance by webinars or other online means.
13. The representative from Lebanon added that one particular aspect that is being taken into consideration in the development of the information system is the capacity to report the data requirements of the GFCM. In this sense, he saw that the system could be valuable to other countries in the sub-region.
14. The representative from GFCM congratulated the project for maintaining the support and advancing on a number of actions in the period, despite the difficulties imposed by the pandemic. Referring to the efforts to upgrade national information systems, he informed the committee that the Secretariat is already discussing with the FAO NFIS team that is developing the *Calipseo* system to understand the capacity of the system to accommodate the requirements of the DCRF. He noted that countries should evaluate if the system will address the national needs in terms of storing and analysing the data collected and additionally be useful to comply with GFCM requirements. He agreed with the view to wait to see the outcomes of the pilot implementation in Lebanon before steps are taken to expand it to other countries. Referring to the work on climate change, he remarked that the work being carried out with experts in the different sub-regions will be very relevant towards the development of an adaptive strategy to climate change. The topic will be in discussion in the upcoming Sub-regional committees and will be an integral part of the new GFCM strategy.
15. The representative from Cyprus thanked the project and GFCM for the organization of the training course on species identification, which sparked a lot of attention and interest in the country. He supported the view to organize similar initiatives in a broader scale in the sub-region and to offer them on a regular basis. He also congratulated the countries, the project and the GFCM for the impressive work carried out in the intersession towards improving the quality of stock assessment from the Eastern Mediterranean.
16. The representative from Lebanon expressed the interest in organizing a similar online training on taxonomic identification dedicated to scientists and staff from the Ministry of Agriculture in Lebanon.

Strategy for strengthening technical assistance and capacity development

17. The EastMed Coordinator introduced the agenda item that was intended to provide an update on the status of the project, describe the changes that occurred in the past year and discuss the outline of a new strategy for technical assistance and capacity development in the sub-region. The presentation first recalled the discussions held in the 10th Coordination Committee meeting regarding the options for enhancing the implementation of project activities. During that meeting, the Coordination Committee discussed the possibility of integrating the project under the framework of the GFCM. The integration would be in line with the mandate, capacities and sub-regional approach of the GFCM and would create the administrative conditions for a smooth operation of the project. At that time, the Coordination Committee was also informed of the favorable view of the main project donor (EU DG MARE) to start the integration in 2021. It was the view of the Coordination Committee that to be successful the integration should maintain important characteristics of the project, more specifically the bottom-up, demand driven approach to technical assistance and the neutral environment that facilitates cooperation at technical and scientific level. In this regard, the Committee was informed of the positive experiences with a similar project run by the GFCM in the Black Sea (BlackSea4Fish Project).
18. He added that, during 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the capacity of the project to deliver the agreed plan of activities resulting in the interruption of some field activities and the cancellation of missions and meetings. Despite the progress made in advancing technical discussions remotely, some activities could not be accomplished. To enable the finalization of the plan of activities FAO requested the donor to extend the termination date of the 2020 grant to December 2021. The extension was approved in January 2021. In the same period, FAO was informed of the decision by the EU DG MARE to shift the support towards regional projects to the GFCM, in view of the future GFCM strategy for 2021-2027.
19. Regarding the future of the project, the Coordinator first recalled that FAO developed the Regional Projects, along an extended period and upon the request of countries, to address an existing demand for mechanisms of capacity development and technical/scientific cooperation. The projects were designed to span for multiple years, conditional on the availability of funds, and until more sustainable mechanisms became available and functional. In this regard, he noted the various changes that occurred in past years that resulted in the strengthening of the technical and institutional capacity of the GFCM, particularly the adoption of the subregional approach during the fourth amendment of the GFCM Agreement (2014) and the enhanced mandate for capacity development and technical assistance entrusted by the 2017 Malta MedFish4Ever Declaration. The post-2020 strategy for the GFCM was expected to consolidate these achievements and establish a new framework for the provision of technical assistance and capacity development. In view of these changes, he concluded that 2021 will be a transition year for the project towards a transfer of activities to the GFCM.

20. The Coordination Committee was invited to i) provide inputs regarding the changes towards a new framework to strengthen technical assistance and capacity development; ii) discuss the steps to be taken to ensure a smooth transition to a new framework and iii) agree on the preparation of a joint work programme (EastMed-GFCM) for the transition phase in 2021.
21. The representative of the GFCM highlighted the important contribution of the FAO Regional Projects to the development of technical capacities in the region. He added that the changes at GFCM started a little earlier, in 2012, with the first attempts to develop sub-regional management plans. At that moment, it became clear the need to create new structures to support the management plans, which triggered the creation of the sub-regional committees. The subregional approach was consolidated during the amendment of the GFCM Agreement and the mandate of the subregional committees was extended. Another important milestone was the creation of the sub-regional technical units. With the support of member countries and donors in 8 years more than 11 management plans were established. All these changes empowered the GFCM to do more sub-regional activities, including capacity building and technical assistance. He noted that the transfer of capacity building and technical support activities under GFCM would ensure maximum coordination and avoid possible duplication of efforts to enhance capacities in the different sub-regions. With regards to the new GFCM strategy and framework for technical assistance and capacity building, he also emphasized that 2021 would be a transition year where GFCM would be discussing the priorities for the next decade, including the provision of support at country, subregional and regional level, and during this year, as in previous years, the GFCM and the projects should continue joining forces to support the implementation of work plans. While welcoming the inputs of the Coordination Committee regarding the new framework and technical needs, he noted that GFCM is planning a meeting with the countries in March 2021 to discuss the new framework. In this regard, he stressed the importance that countries coordinate their views internally to communicate with the GFCM through their focal points to this meeting. He finally reiterated that the GFCM is ready to work tightly with the project to ensure a smooth transition in 2021, addressing in particular the needs of all countries to comply with their adopted priorities and obligations within the GFCM.
22. In his intervention, the Leader of the Assessment and Management Team of the FAO Fisheries Division noted that the transition towards a permanent structure for the regional projects within the GFCM was always foreseen by FAO. The transition will involve some challenges and adjustments but will also create opportunities to strengthen and create a more long-term approach for technical assistance and capacity development. He invited the members of the Coordination Committee to use 2021, which will be a transition year in the process of integration, as an opportunity to provide inputs on how best to structure the new framework for technical assistance, using the Coordination Committee and the national channels of communication with the GFCM. He finally stressed that the FAO-EastMed project will stand ready to cooperate tightly with the GFCM in 2021 to make sure that the identified priorities for the countries are addressed during the process of transition.

23. The representative from Lebanon expressed his favorable view of joining efforts during the transition phase. The Ministry had very positive experience in working with GFCM and EastMed to address specific technical issues, such as discards monitoring. He considered the integration of the capacity building and technical assistance activities previously carried out by the Regional Projects within GFCM the final goal since the beginning and that the integration represented a positive step forward to strengthen technical assistance to countries. He finally noted the importance of maintaining the technical expertise acquired during the years of collaboration with the project in the new framework of collaboration with the GFCM. More time will be needed during the year to reflect on this and other challenges that may arise in the process of integration.
24. The representative from Turkey also highlighted the fact that the project had a long history in the region and that the knowledge and networks created need to be maintained in the process of integration with the GFCM.
25. The representative from Egypt considered the integration of the activities of the project under GFCM a good step forward to reinforce the assistance to the countries.
26. The representative of the GFCM explained that the intention is to maintain all the elements that worked well in the project, but that the exact mechanism of operation will have to be discussed with the countries. He anticipated the need to create a project steering committee with similar functions to the coordination committee, complementing the role of the Sub-Regional Committee (SRC-EM). The exact format of the project steering committee is yet to be discussed with the countries but it will be based on the principles of transparency and bottom-up approach to discuss and propose priorities taking into account the inputs received from the countries and the decisions at the level of the Commission.
27. The representative from Cyprus was favorable to make the project work as a specialized tool of the SRC-EM, where countries would have an opportunity to discuss their needs and topics of interest through a bottom-up approach.
28. The representative from Egypt reiterated that the integration will provide a good opportunity to enhance the type of work previously carried out by the project and support other activities agreed by countries during the SAC. He was favorable of the project joining forces with the GFCM in 2021 to ensure a smooth transition.
29. The representative from Palestine expressed his satisfaction with the work carried out and the achievements obtained by the project until now and that he was looking forward to continue cooperating with the project under the new framework in the future.
30. Following the input coming from the representative from Lebanon, the Coordination Committee discussed and agreed to organize another meeting before the SRC-EM to further discuss technical activities to be carried out jointly by EastMed and GFCM in 2021

and to discuss the priorities to be launched in 2022 to be brought to the attention of the SRC-EM.

GFCM activities for the next intersessional period

31. The GFCM Secretariat delivered a presentation that introduced the subregional technical unit for the Eastern Mediterranean, hosted at FAO Lebanon in Beirut. The technical unit opened in 2019 to provide the subregion with strategic and technical assistance while implementing GFCM policies and activities. Next, the Secretariat gave an overview of the work foreseen by the GFCM for the 2021 intersession relevant to the Eastern Mediterranean, dividing it into regular SAC activities, mid-term strategy activities and other activities. Regular SAC activities included i) the working groups on stock assessment and subregional committee (SRC) meetings, ii) assessment and management of round sardinella and deep-water red shrimp, iii) essential fish habitats (EFH) and vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) research programmes, iv) research programmes for red coral, European eel and Blue crab in the Mediterranean, v) the implementation of priority actions in the RPOA-SSF, and vi) working group on fishing technology. On the other hand, mid-term strategy activities will cover i) the bycatch programme, ii) fishing surveys at sea, iii) data collection on recreational fisheries, iv) the regional survey on socio-economic characteristics of fisheries, v) advances towards an adaptation strategy for climate change and non-indigenous species. Finally, other activities included i) the technical assistance and capacity building based on national requests for technical assistance made by Jordan, Palestine, and Syria, ii) the New strategy (2021 - 2030) towards sustainable fisheries and aquaculture and iii) the Fish Forum and UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030). The presentation ended with a list of relevant meetings for 2020/2021 of relevance for eastern Mediterranean / regional activities.
32. The representative of GFCM also acknowledged the importance and relevance of the work jointly being carried out with EastMed in the last year and in particular the one towards the benchmark assessment of round sardinella. She invited the project to present the results of the trials with small scale fishing gears in Lebanon in the next meeting of the WGFIT. She finally stressed the importance for the GFCM of the non-indigenous species (NIS) monitoring program through local ecological knowledge (LEK) protocols.

Work Plan for 2021

33. EastMed introduced the work plan for 2021 and invited the Coordination Committee to consider: i) demands and priorities identified in the previous year that could not be fully accomplished because of the pandemic; ii) the likely continuation of a “pandemic” scenario for most of 2021 will impact the capacity to organize field work and in person meetings; iii) the need to prepare a joint work programme with the GFCM for 2021 to

ensure a smooth transition. A summary of the planned activities and meetings is reported in Table 1.

34. The Coordination Committee agreed for the project to maintain the main priority activities identified and initiated in the previous period, working in coordination with the GFCM, and to use the upcoming meetings of the SRC-EM and WGFIT to present the outcomes of some of the key activities and discuss follow up actions and other priorities for the future. To facilitate the discussion of future demands, it was agreed to organize a second meeting of the Coordination Committee prior to the meeting of the SRC-EM (24 – 29 May 2021).

Adoption of the report

35. The report was adopted by e-mail on the 15th of February 2021.

Table 1. Proposed plan of activities for 2021 in relation to plan of activities agreed in the last Coordination Committee meeting, Rome, November 2019.

Activities agreed in last Coordination Committee	Plan for 2021
1. Support to fisheries and biological data collection in Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Turkey and Syria.	Continue work initiated in Lebanon, Palestine and Turkey. Coordinate with GFCM to initiate support to Syria.
2. Support to development, maintenance and upgrading of fisheries information systems, including databases and software, in Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine and Syria	Continue work initiated in Lebanon in coordination with GFCM. Discuss in SRC-EM progress made and possibility to expand the work in 2022.
3. Support the development and implementation of EAF pilot case studies in the sub-region, including new pilots integrating an ecosystem approach to aquaculture.	Finalize pilot in Gökçeada Island, Turkey Finalize technical report on Palestine. Present results at the SRC-EM
4. Organization of a Seminar on EAF experiences in the Mediterranean, in collaboration with other Regional Projects and other organizations	Finalize FAO Technical Report with results of the Workshop “Transition to EAF in the Mediterranean” Present outcomes in the SRC-EM
5. Organization of a session within the SRC-EM on vulnerability and adaptation options to climate change in the Eastern Mediterranean, in collaboration with the GFCM	Present results in the SRC-EM
6. Organization of the Summer School on quantitative fisheries stock assessment, in collaboration with FAO Regional projects, GFCM and JRC	In view of the impossibility to organize in person meetings, replace it with online training options (see 7).
7. Organization of additional ad hoc trainings on stock assessment and R, upon request of countries.	Continue offering online training options for needs identified in the region
8. Support on-the-job training activities for the design of scientific surveys and the analysis of survey data, upon request of countries	Upon request of countries, organize online training courses on specific survey-related topics.
9. Organization of sub-regional training in the sampling and identification of by-catches, discards and incidental catches of vulnerable species in collaboration with GFCM	Online training for Lebanese experts and staff from MoA

Activities agreed in last Coordination Committee	Plan for 2021
10. Organization of EastMed Study Group on intercalibration of fish otolith reading	Finalization of the work on round sardinella. Discuss at SRC-EM mechanism for continuation of the activity, including other species.
11. Organization of the EastMed WG on Fisheries Data Analysis, including a session on EFH for priority species.	Continue the organization of online data preparation meetings in coordination with GFCM for the assessment of priority species. Discuss at SRC-EM mechanism for continuation of the activity.
12. Organization of the data preparation meeting for deep water red shrimp in the Central-Eastern Mediterranean, in collaboration with MedSudMed and GFCM	Continue online data preparation meetings.
13. Support the implementation of the adopted work plan for the identification of stock units of round sardinella in the Eastern Mediterranean (FISHBONE), including a final workshop	Finalization of analyses, organization of the final workshop online, in connection with sardinella benchmark
14. Support the participation of EastMed countries in planned meetings and data analysis activities planned under the EU-funded stock identification study for priority species in the Mediterranean (MED-UNITS)	Participation in relevant online meetings organized by the project
15. Support further experimental trials using artisanal fishing gears in Lebanon	Continue trials and prepare final report. Present the results obtained so far in the WG Fishing Gear Technologies (April, 2021). Discuss the continuation of the work as part of the work plan of the WGFT.
16. Support the organization of exploratory egg and larvae surveys at sea in Egypt and Lebanon	Discuss at the SRC-EM the need to develop common methodologies and harmonization of surveys.
17. Support the pilot testing of LEK protocol for the monitoring of non-indigenous species in relation to fisheries in the eastern Mediterranean	Organization of online training on the LEK protocol and methodology.

Activities agreed in last Coordination Committee	Plan for 2021
18. Facilitate attendance of national experts to the relevant meetings of GFCM and its subsidiary bodies	Continue supporting participation in online meetings
19. Improve the dissemination of project events, results and achievements through the enhancement of project website, the preparation of technical report and publications and the production of other promotional material (e.g. videos)	Initiate migration of project website and documents to a more sustainable platform

Annex I. List of Participants

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Annex II. Annotated Agenda of the Eleventh Meeting of the EastMed Coordination Committee, 9:00 – 13:30 CET, February 1st 2021

- 9:00 – 9:15** **Opening of the meeting**
Adoption of the agenda
- 9:15 – 10:15** **Report on the Project’s progress**
Presentation on the progress and achievements of the project since the last Coordination Committee Meeting in November 2019. The presentation will be followed by open discussion.
- Break 15’**
- 10:30 – 11:30** **Strategy for strengthening technical assistance and capacity development: 2021 and beyond.**
The CC will be briefed on the situation of the project. The CC will be invited to provide inputs to the outline of a new framework for technical assistance and capacity development for 2021 and beyond.
- 11:30 – 12:00** **GFCM activities for the next intersessional period**
Presentation of the GFCM planned scientific and technical activities of relevance to the Eastern Mediterranean sub-region.
- 12:30 – 13:30** **Programme of work for 2021**
The CC will discuss and elaborate a plan of work for 2021, considering the achievements in the previous period and the identified priorities for 2021
- 13:30** **Any other matters**
Closure of the meeting

Annex III. Report of the Intersessional Activities of the FAO – EastMed Project (November 2019 - January 2021).

This document summarizes the main activities carried out by the FAO-EastMed Project since the last Coordination Committee meeting (Rome, Italy, 26-27 November 2019), covering the period from November 2019 to January 2021. The activities carried out during the inter-committee period followed the methodological framework of the project and its mandate for this phase. Activities and outputs are organized according to the main project components:

- 1) Institutional strengthening
- 2) Staff training and development
- 3) Data collection and analysis
- 4) Increased participation and Cooperation

Project Component 1 - Institutional Strengthening

The objective of this component is to strengthen the capacity of the fisheries departments/agencies in the Eastern Mediterranean countries to undertake the basic elements of fisheries monitoring and management. Particular attention is given to the development and strengthening of fisheries information systems in selected countries and to support actions for mainstreaming the ecosystem approach to fisheries management. Through this component, the project has also supported the identification of options for the diversification of fisheries activities in selected countries. The activities under this component contribute to Targets 1 and 5 of the GFCM Mid-term Strategy and to action (b) of the Malta MedFish4Ever Ministerial Declaration.

➤ *Support the development and implementation of fisheries management plans according to EAF framework*

In an effort to mainstream the ecosystem approach to fisheries management, since 2016 EastMed has been supporting EAF pilot studies in Eastern Mediterranean countries. The first three pilot studies were the small-scale fisheries in Gökova Bay, Turkey; the small-scale purse seine fisheries for small pelagics in Lebanon; and the demersal fisheries of Egypt. Following the overall FAO methodology for EAF implementation, draft fisheries management plans were prepared for the three pilot studies, two of them awaiting endorsement of national authorities and one (Egypt) already in process of implementation.

With a view to support actions to address some of the priority areas identified in the draft management plan for Gokova Bay (Turkey), the project continued to facilitate the engagement of Turkey in the FAO Interregional Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) on “Blue Hope Initiative in the Mediterranean Sea”. The objective of the TCP (involving Turkey, Algeria and Tunisia) is to strengthen the capacity of stakeholders to develop integrated, multi-sectoral investment plans using the FAO Blue Growth (BGI) framework. During the reporting period, the project participated in two virtual meetings with TCP staff and Turkish counterparts to discuss investment priorities to put the management plan in place and provided technical inputs

to the planned TCP-funded socio-economic survey in Gökova and other areas in Turkey designed to provide complementary information to the Blue Hope investment plans. Following the successful implementation of the EAF pilot in Gökova Bay, FAO and the Turkish Directorate General of Fisheries and Aquaculture conceived a project for the implementation of second EAF pilot in the island of Gökçeada. During the reporting period, EastMed travelled to Gökçeada, Turkey (20 February 2020) to co-organize the kick-off meeting of the pilot project. The meeting was attended by about 50 participants, including authorities, scientists, NGOs and fishers. Following the kick-off meeting, the coordination team met to discuss next phases of the project, including the preparation of fieldwork and the baseline report. The results of field work and literature review carried out during 2020 were integrated into a draft baseline report that will be presented for stakeholder inputs and review during the next stakeholder consultation meeting (dates still to be defined).

Following the request from Palestine to initiate a pilot action on EAF, the project started to work with Palestinian experts in the preparation of a technical report on “*Marine fisheries in Palestine: status and challenges for meeting sustainable goals*”. The report under preparation will provide an updated and compressive description of marine capture fisheries in Palestine, covering as much as possible the three pillars of EAF: ecological, socioeconomic and governance aspects. By identifying the main current threats to the sustainability of fisheries, the report will provide the basis for further capacity development actions in support of sustainable fisheries management in Palestine.

The project organized, in collaboration with the FAO Fisheries Division and the other FAO Regional Projects, an online workshop from 9 to 10 December 2020 on the “**Transition towards an ecosystem approach to fisheries in the Mediterranean: lessons learned through selected case studies**”. Selected experiences with the implementation of EAF-like approaches to fisheries management in the Mediterranean Sea were compared and analyzed with a view to contribute to global efforts by FAO to identify lessons regarding enabling factors and main challenges to strengthen EAF implementation. The workshop discussed 10 case study fisheries from different sub-regions of the Mediterranean, selected for their recognized attempts to change management practices in line with some of the basic principles of EAF, including participatory and adaptive fisheries management. Three case studies from the Eastern Mediterranean presented the lessons with the implementation of EAF in Turkey, Lebanon and Egypt. Participants agreed on a roadmap to the preparation of a technical report that will document the case studies and the main lessons emerging from their comparative analysis.

In preparation to the workshop described above, the project supported an evaluation of the progress made with the implementation of EAF in the FAO-supported case studies using the EAF Implementation Monitoring Tool (IMT), developed in the framework of the FAO-EAF Nansen project. The IMT is based on a set of standard questions and criteria covering all the EAF components. The tool was presented and used in practical exercises during two online workshops with national experts from Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia and Turkey on 16 November and 2 December 2020. The preliminary results of the exercise were presented at the workshop in 9-10 December 2020. The most valuable outcome from the exercise was the discussions that the scoring process generated, which enabled national partners to identify the current limitations and achievements in the management of the case study fisheries.

➤ ***Progress in the evaluation of vulnerabilities and adaptation options to cope with climate-related impacts on fisheries in Eastern Mediterranean***

Within the framework of the Mid-Term Strategy for the sustainability of fisheries in the Mediterranean, a roadmap was established by the GFCM to develop a regional strategy to cope

with the effects of climate change on fisheries. With a view to contribute to the roadmap, the FAO Regional Projects engaged in the assessment of the vulnerability of fisheries to climate change in each of the Mediterranean sub-regions. The assessment of the vulnerability of small-pelagic and demersal fisheries in the Eastern Mediterranean was finalized in 2020 by a team of experts from the subregion. The work involved the preparation of a scoping report detailing the current ecological, socio-economic and institutional situation of the fisheries as well as the main climate-related drivers of change to the fisheries. In a second step, the different pathways of impact of climate on fisheries were identified and their relative importance assessed by means of a risk assessment. Plans were in place to present the results of the assessment for validation by the GFCM SRC-EM during the first quarter of 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the SRC-EM meeting was postponed to May 2021. In view of the concomitant progress made with the vulnerability assessments in other subregions of the Mediterranean, and with the intention of producing a unified diagnostic of the whole Mediterranean, the project has been working together with the other FAO Regional Projects in the preparation of a synthesis document with technical inputs to the regional adaptation strategy. The document integrates the results of the sub-regional evaluations and identifies a set of possible adaptation measures to the identified high priority risks. The document is expected to be completed by the upcoming SRC meetings in 2021. The project participated also in the preparation of a contribution to the GFCM SOMFI 2020 detailing the methodology and main advances with vulnerability assessments.

➤ *Support to national fisheries information systems and databases*

The project continued to provide support to adjust and upgrade national fisheries information systems and databases. In Lebanon, past work identified several issues that affected the suitability of the FLOUCA system to produce reliable catch and effort statistics and to serve the needs of the MoA. Upon the request of Lebanon during the last Coordination Committee, the project launched an action to evaluate the needs and requirements for an upgraded fishery information system. The first phase of the action, carried out in collaboration with the FAO Fishery Statistics and Information Team (NFIS), will produce a situation assessment and elaborate a roadmap to upgrade FLOUCA into an improved information system. An expert was hired by the project to review the structure and data model of the FLOUCA system and its capacity to integrate other available national databases (e.g. fisheries registry and socio-economics). The review will also evaluate the capacity of the system to report according to GFCM DCRF requirements. The first phase of the work initiated in 2020 and will be finalized in the first quarter of 2021 with recommendations and a workplan for further implementation of the upgraded system.

➤ *Support for the IT infrastructure in Lebanon*

As part of this component, the project has been also providing IT and laboratory equipment following specific request from the participating countries and based on the availability of resources. In the intersession period, the project supported the procurement of 10 PCs to upgrade the IT systems of the DWF - Ministry of Agriculture of Lebanon.

Project Component 2 - Staff Training and Development

The objective of this component is to develop technical capacities of national experts on different aspects related to fisheries monitoring, assessment and management. Through this component the project organizes or facilitates the participation to training courses, on-the-job

training, and technical workshops on issues of relevance to the fisheries departments.

Webinar on Local Ecological Knowledge based monitoring. One of the topics of interest and priority in the Eastern Mediterranean is the monitoring of NIS. The project planned the launching of pilot projects to obtain Local Ecological Knowledge (LEK) on the occurrence and spread of selected NIS, but due to the pandemic the activity was put temporarily on hold. With a view to increase awareness about the use of Local Ecological Knowledge (LEK) and the available LEK protocols for the monitoring of non-indigenous species (NIS), EastMed in collaboration with the other FAO Regional Projects, organized a webinar on the information gained through LEK to track and tackle some emerging changes in Mediterranean fish diversity. Based on the experience of an international team of scientists, the webinar demonstrated that sound protocols have been built providing new perspectives in the use of LEK for large-scale studies and periodical monitoring. The webinar took place on 11 June 2020 and was attended by over 40 scientists from various Mediterranean countries.

Data-limited methods for the assessment of round sardinella. With the objective to advance towards the benchmark assessment of round sardinella in the Eastern Mediterranean, the project and the GFCM organized a series of online workshops during the reporting period (2, 8 and 20 July 2020) aimed at improving proficiency in the use of two length-based stock assessment methods: LIME and LBSPR. These workshops were preceded by an online training session on data exploration “Exploring a dataset: how to import libraries, plot data and combine plots in R”. The online training workshops were attended by researchers from Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey and Cyprus involved in the assessment of round sardinella.

Empirical Indicators for Fisheries Management Advice. The FAO Mediterranean Projects AdriaMed, CopeMed, EastMed and MedsudMed organized, in collaboration with the FAO-Fisheries Division, the Online course/Workshop on Empirical Indicators for Fisheries Management Advice (19-23 October 2020). The course was attended by 27 participants, mainly senior scientists from 13 Mediterranean countries involved in the Projects activities. The course focused on Empirical Management Procedures and particularly on the development, selection, and use of empirical indicators to provide operational fisheries management advice. Its starting point was the set of basic requirements of the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries applied to fisheries management processes. During the workshop most of the time was dedicated to discussing the process and criteria for selecting, validating, using and communicating empirical indicators, and on how to run a peer-validation process for improving the credibility and legitimacy of the indicators and their use in management. A pool of indicators was selected and real data exercises on two stocks formally assessed in the Mediterranean were completed. The results were discussed to highlight properties of indicators and to compare the findings with the outcomes of model-based assessment.

Collecting data on by-catch, discard and vulnerable species with a focus on the identification of sharks, skates and rays. On 4-5 November 2020, the Project in collaboration with the GFCM, organized an online seminar to ministry officers, biologists, data collectors and inspectors from Cyprus aimed at refining the knowledge on monitoring discards and bycatches especially for species in which stock assessments are currently conducted and vulnerable groups such as elasmobranchs. In the first day, data collection protocols on vulnerable species, macrobenthos and marine litter were detailed. In the second day participants were trained on techniques for bycatch/discards sampling and taxonomic identification of cartilaginous fish species. Keys to identification of sharks, skates, rays and chimaeras specifically designed for this training course were handed to inspectors and data

collectors.

Small-Scale Fisheries University Day. The SSF-University DAY was a single day event organized on 10 November 2020 by the FAO Mediterranean Projects and the FAO GFCM BlackSea4Fish Project in collaboration with several national partner organizations. The event was part of the Small Scale Fisheries University launched by the FAO General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (FAO – GFCM) in the framework of the Regional Plan of Action for a Small Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. The Day foresaw national workshops to address common regional SSF issues such as collaborative science and the valorisation of fishers' knowledge, thus including participatory data collection, local ecological knowledge (LEK), perception on climate change and environmental impacts of fishing. The event was an opportunity to give voice to fishers and to promote a proactive dialogue among them, scientists and national administration. The SSF University DAY was held virtually in 13 different localities at the same time involving 20 institutions and more than 200 connected participants.

Project Component 3 - Data Collection and Analyses

The objective of this component was to assist eastern Mediterranean countries to improve/develop national fishery data collection programs, including catch, effort, biological and socioeconomic data, fishery-independent surveys and to support the analysis and use of the data collected for scientific advice to fisheries management. Table 1 summarizes the biological data collection supported by the project in past years. The component also aimed at supporting coordinated and cooperative activities in fisheries research, which, in their turn, would support fisheries processes at sub-regional level under the framework of the GFCM.

➤ ***Support to fisheries data collection in Lebanon***

The EastMed project has been providing technical and financial assistance to Lebanon since 2012 to improve the fisheries data collection system, including catch and effort data collection system, biological sampling and socio-economic surveys, in line with GFCM Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF). In 2015, the project supported the development of a sampling strategy and the collection of catch and effort data by the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA). Apart from this, biological sampling and socio-economic data have also been supported by the project in the past years. During the 9th Coordination Committee meeting of EastMed (FAO HQs, Rome, Italy, 13 – 14 November 2018), Lebanon requested the support of the Project for the continuation of the ongoing data collection activities on catch, effort, biological and socio-economic variables. Since 2018 the Project centered its activities on the biological sampling of priority species through a Letter of Agreement with the National Council for Scientific Research (CNRS-L) and the collection of catch and effort data through an agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA). Due to recurrent administrative issues, and more recently because of the COVID-19 pandemic, these activities have been interrupted for part of 2018, 2019 and 2020. The project organized a joint mission with the GFCM to Lebanon from 17 to 19 February 2020 with the objective to elaborate a plan of work for 2020. On the one hand, operational technical and administrative aspects on the experimental MEDITS-like trawl survey that was expected to be carried out in Lebanese waters in 2020 were thoroughly discussed with the CNRS-L, the MoA and other concerned institutions. On the other hand, bilateral discussions took also place with CNRS-L and MoA officers to outline common actions

to put in place in 2020, including the continuation of the biological data collection for priority species. A new LoA with CNRS-L was prepared to be launched in the second semester of 2020 but was never implemented due to the pandemic and other administrative issues beyond the control of the project. More recently, agreement was reached with the MoA to support the collection of catch and effort data in the last quarter of 2020. The project is currently working with MoA and CNRS-L to resume these activities in the first quarter of 2021.

➤ ***Support to fisheries data collection in Turkey***

Since 2018 the Project has been supporting a biological sampling program for the priority species in the Aegean and Mediterranean coasts of Turkey, in line with the Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF). Based on the advice of national scientists from universities and experts from Ministry of Food Agriculture and Livestock (MoFAL) a scheme for the biological data collection was agreed for this pilot project. The Ministry is facilitating the implementation of the fisheries dependent data collection with the assistance of the officers in provincial directories and in Mediterranean Fisheries Research Production and Training Institute (MEDFRI). The species covered by the sampling are *Sardinella aurita*, *Engraulis encrasicolus*, *Sardina pilchardus*, *Mullus barbatus*, *Aristaeomorpha foliacea* and *Aristeus antennatus*. In 2019 and 2020, biological data of the blue crab *Callinectes sapidus* in lagoons and lakes in GSA 22 and 24 was also collected. Interruptions in the support of the project occurred in the last two years due to internal administrative issues to FAO and the impact of the pandemic in 2020. The project is currently working with the MEDFRI to extend the biological sampling activities throughout 2021.

➤ ***Support to fisheries data collection in Palestine***

During the 10th EastMed Coordination Committee meeting, it was agreed to continue support fisheries and biological data collection in Palestine. Data has been collected along the coast in four landing sites (Palestine City, Dar al Balah, Khan Yunes and Rafah). The first pilot study was completed at the end of 2013, and continued on a regular basis from 2014 to 2020, with some interruptions in the last years due to delays in administrative procedures. The components covered during 2020 included the sampling of biological parameters for priority species, the collection of information on discards and bycatches onboard fishing vessels and the collection of socio-economic data for the 2019 reference year.

➤ ***Support surveys using artisanal commercial fishing gears in Lebanon***

The project continued to support fishing trials with nets and traps specifically designed for the Lebanese situation to test the feasibility and efficacy of some commercial fishing gears in targeting commercially relevant species over the continental shelf and upper slope while minimizing unwanted by-catch (especially of sharks). The general long-term objective is to increase the array of métiers available for small-scale fisheries in Lebanon. During 2020, 12 additional trials were performed. Biological and socio-economic data were collected in each fishing operation by observers onboard with a view to assess the economic performance and ecological impacts of the gears.

➤ ***Organization of the joint EastMed/GFCM online preparatory sessions towards the benchmark assessment for round sardinella***

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the GFCM benchmark assessment for round sardinella

scheduled for May 2020 was postponed to 2021. However, EastMed and GFCM jointly organised a series of online preliminary sessions to discuss data availability, including biological parameters and preliminary ALKs, as well as modelling approaches to be used in the benchmark assessment. In the first two sessions (4 May and 9 June 2020) The group reviewed the progress made in the age reading and the definition of stock boundaries of sardinella (FISHBONE project). The group identified a workable way forward in accordance with restrictions still in place in some countries due to the COVID-19 outbreak. In order to enhance the capacity of national experts on some of the potential methods to be used in the benchmark assessment, a series of webinars were planned and delivered (see Component 2) covering data exploratory analysis and the use of length-based methods (LBSPR and LIME). A follow up online meeting was organized on 30 October 2020, within the EastMed Working Group on Data Analysis, to take stock of the progress made, compare preliminary assessment and identify further work to be done until the benchmark. Experts presented and discussed the advances in age-length key determination, estimates of growth parameters and preliminary stock assessment results using VIT, LBSPR and LIME. The sessions were attended by experts from Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey and Cyprus and by an international stock assessment expert (Dr Ricardo Amoroso).

➤ ***Online Meetings of the EastMed Study Group on round sardinella***

The EastMed Working Group on round sardinella physically met last time in Bari, Italy, from 1 to 5 July 2019 and was attended by experts from Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Turkey, Cyprus and Italy. The working group main objectives are i) to investigate the population structure of round sardinella, *Sardinella aurita*, in the Eastern Mediterranean (FISHBONE project) and ii) to define ageing criterion and aging scheme for the species. In view of the upcoming benchmark assessment of the species, the Group virtually convened three times in 2020 (11 February, 16 March and 29 October) to discuss preliminary results of the FISHBONE project and the progress with age reading of sardinella otoliths. The targets for age reading were completed for most sites and the first ALK prepared by each country. Progress was also made in the analysis of otolith shape, body morphometry and meristics. The Group agreed on the need to complete pending activities (in particular, genetic analyses were slightly delayed) and enlarge the array of inputs with the analysis of fisheries (landing, CPUE) and environmental data could shed light on the stock boundary hypotheses by showing patterns in the data over time and space and possible similarities among areas. Among the topics for further analysis were the relationship between environmental data and biological parameters (maturity, growth, etc.) and the hydrodynamic processes (currents) that could explain possible connectivity among sites.

➤ ***Online Working Group on Fisheries Data Analysis***

Due to the travel restrictions, the customary EastMed Working Group on Fisheries Data Analysis was spread over three online sessions between November and December 2020. The first two sessions were dedicated to the ongoing work on sardinella (reported in previous sections). The last session took place on 8 December 2020, when participants presented the available data and ongoing work to assess the status of demersal species in the Eastern Mediterranean. The presentations covered the following stocks: Egypt: *Mullus surmuletus*; Turkey: *Mullus barbatus*; Cyprus: *Mullus barbatus*; Lebanon: *Pagellus erythrinus*; *Lithognathus mormirus*; Palestine: *Nemipterus randalli*. During the session the group exchanged views and discussed any issues related to data preparation and preliminary assessment of the stocks, with a view to contribute to the preparation of more robust

assessments to be presented at the meeting of the GFCM WGSA (January 2021). The EastMed WG was attended by 20 participants, including experts from all the EastMed countries.

➤ ***Progress in data preparation for the assessment of deep water red shrimp in the central-eastern Mediterranean Sea***

Since the MedSudMed/EastMed/GFCM data preparation meeting on deep water red shrimp in the central-eastern Mediterranean Sea (14 – 18 October 2019), the group of experts has been working online to progress on the different fronts: i) update biological parameters; ii) collation and analysis of survey data; iii) further refinement of the definition of fishing grounds using available AIS/LEK data and multicriteria decision analysis; and iv) advance on the table of contents for a publication (FAO Technical Paper or a GFCM Studies and Reviews) on “Synthesis on the biology, ecology and fisheries of deepwater red shrimps *Aristaeomorpha foliacea* and *Aristeus antennatus* in the Central-Eastern Mediterranean (GSA 12 – 16, 18 – 27)”. Several experts from the EastMed countries are participating in the above activities.

Table 1. Biological data collection for priority species supported by EastMed (* indicates years only partially covered)

Species	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018*	2019*	2020*
Small pelagics								
<i>Sardinella aurita</i>	Egypt	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine Lebanon	Egypt Palestine Lebanon	Egypt Palestine Lebanon	Egypt Palestine Lebanon Turkey	Palestine Lebanon Turkey	Palestine Turkey
<i>Engraulis encrasicolus</i>	Egypt	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine Lebanon	Egypt Palestine Lebanon	Egypt Palestine Lebanon	Egypt Palestine Lebanon Turkey	Palestine Lebanon Turkey	Palestine Turkey
<i>Sardina pilchardus</i>	Egypt	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine Lebanon	Egypt Palestine Lebanon	Egypt Palestine Lebanon	Egypt Palestine Lebanon Turkey	Palestine Lebanon Turkey	Palestine Turkey
Demersal								
<i>Mullus surmuletus</i>	Egypt	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Palestine	Palestine
<i>Mullus barbatus</i>	Egypt	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine Turkey	Palestine Turkey	Palestine Turkey
<i>Saurida undosquamis</i>	Egypt	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Palestine	Palestine
<i>Upeneus molucensis</i>		Palestine	Palestine	Palestine	Palestine	Palestine	Palestine	Palestine
<i>Nemipterus randalli</i>		Palestine	Palestine	Palestine	Palestine	Palestine	Palestine	Palestine
<i>Pagellus erythrinus</i>			Lebanon	Lebanon	Lebanon	Lebanon	Lebanon	Lebanon
<i>Pagellus acarne</i>							Lebanon	Lebanon
<i>Lithognathus mormyrus</i>			Lebanon	Lebanon	Lebanon	Lebanon	Lebanon	Lebanon
<i>Merluccius merluccius</i>	Egypt	Egypt	Egypt	Egypt	Egypt	Egypt		
<i>Metapenaeus stebbingi</i>	Egypt	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Palestine	Palestine
<i>Parapenaeus</i>	Egypt	Egypt	Egypt	Egypt	Egypt	Egypt	Palestine	Palestine

<i>longirostris</i>	Palestine	Palestine	Palestine	Palestine	Palestine		
<i>Aristaeomorpha</i>				Egypt	Egypt	Turkey	Turkey
<i>foliacea</i>					Turkey		
<i>Aristeus</i>				Egypt	Egypt	Turkey	Turkey
<i>antennatus</i>					Turkey		
<i>Callinectes</i>						Turkey	Turkey
<i>sapidus</i>							

Project Component 4 - Increased Participation and Cooperation

The objective of this component is to promote sub-regional cooperation and collaboration for fishery research, monitoring and management and will support Government staff to attend and fully participating in GFCM (and other) regional meetings

➤ ***Organization of the 10th EastMed Coordination Committee Meeting***

The 10th Coordination Committee meeting of the EastMed project was held at FAO HQs in Rome, Italy, from 26 to 27 November 2019. The meeting was attended by representatives from Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Turkey and Palestine, by staff of the FAO Regional Projects MedSudMed, AdriaMed and CopeMed, the GFCM Secretariat and the European Commission. After the election of the chairperson, the activities of the 10th year of the project were presented, followed by proposals of activities for the 11th year from each country. The prolonged activity of EastMed was considered as a sign of the continued importance and relevance of the Project in promoting scientific cooperation and capacity development for sustainable fisheries management in the sub-region. The Committee had a lengthy discussion on the administrative issues faced by the project that are resulting in delays and sometimes interruption in the execution of important field activities. Options to mitigate the problems were discussed, including the proposed integration of the project in the framework of the GFCM. In the view of FAO, the integration would be in line with the mandate and capacities of the GFCM, especially in view of the established sub-regional approach, and would create the administrative conditions for a smooth operation of the project. The Committee concurred that to be successful, the integration should maintain important characteristics of the project, particularly the bottom-up, demand-drive approach to country support and the neutral environment that enables the project to discuss and advance cooperation on technical grounds. A future integration should not change the character of the project but help mitigate the administrative difficulties faced to implement activities. The issue will be further discussed during the current Coordination Committee meeting.

➤ ***Participation at GFCM meetings***

Due to the travel restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, all relevant presential technical meetings of the GFCM were postponed to 2021. Therefore, the project did not provide the customary support to experts from Eastern Mediterranean countries to participate in GFCM meetings. Nonetheless, project participated in online discussions, workshops and webinars organized by the GFCM in the period, including:

- GFCM Online Forum dedicated to building fisheries and aquaculture resilience post COVID-19 (25 June, July 1, 22 July, 2020)

- BlackSea4Fish Technical presentation on Biological Reference Points (8 December 2020)
- BlackSea4Fish Technical presentation on Data limited stock assessment models (22 December 2020)
- GFCM Working Groups on Stock Assessment (WGSA) of Demersal and Small Pelagic Species, 18-30 January 2021

➤ ***Coordination among the sub-regional projects, with the GFCM and the donors including Italy and the EU***

In order to strengthen international and regional cooperation the project is interacting closely with the FAO sub-Regional Projects, AdriaMed, MedsudMed and CopeMed II throughout the year with several co-ordination meetings. These meetings were held in order to consolidate and envisage common activities. In this respect the project also participated to in the Coordination Committee of AdriaMed, MedsudMed and CopeMed II where synergies were identified. Training activities were coordinated among all the Projects, in order to avoid duplication or overlapping of activities.

Cooperation was further sustained with the GFCM Secretariat in different fronts, including in the preparatory work for the assessment of round sardinella and deepwater red shrimps, small-scale fisheries, climate change and technical support to Eastern Mediterranean countries.

The Project has also maintained regular communication with the donors (EU-DG-MARE and MIPAAF-Italy) during the intersession to report on the progress made in execution of project activities and to discuss future funding opportunities.

➤ ***Project communication***

The project maintained a regular communication channel with the network of experts, research institutions and fisheries administrations in the countries, as well as with regional organizations and FAO. Activities and outputs of the project are disseminated through regular meetings with the national counterparts and also through mailing lists and the project website (www.faoeastmed.org).

The following technical reports and publications were produced by the project or with the participation of the project in the intersession period:

Documents published and available in the project website

EastMed, 2019. Report of the 10th Meeting of the EastMed Co-ordination Committee. GCP/INT/363/EC – 041/ITA/TD-28. FAO, Rome. 33 pp.

Report of the EastMed Working Group on Fisheries Data Analysis and Joint EastMed/GFCM data preparatory meeting on round sardinella in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. EastMed Technical Documents TD-29. 26pp.

Report of the EastMed Working Group Meeting on round sardinella. EastMed Technical Documents TD-30. 17pp.

Pinello, D., Salah, A., Mohamed, A., Hussin, S., Madi, A., Salah, J., Jawhar, S., Nassar, H., Nassar, A., Üstündağ, E. & Kanyilmaz, M. 2020. A subregional analysis of the socio-economic

situation of the eastern Mediterranean fisheries. Fisheries and Aquaculture Circular No.1196. Rome, FAO. 57pp

Scientific papers and other publications

Lteif M., Jemaaa S., Mouawad R., Khalaf G., Lelli S., Fakhri M. 2020. Population biology of the common pandora, *Pagellus erythrinus* (Linnaeus, 1758) along the Lebanese coast, Eastern Mediterranean. Egyptian Journal of Aquatic Research 46(1). DOI: 10.1016/j.ejar.2020.01.002

Mancusi, C., et al. 2020. MEDLEM database, a data collection on large Elasmobranchs in the Mediterranean and Black seas. Mediterranean Marine Science, 21(2), 276-288. DOI:<https://doi.org/10.12681/mms.21148>.

Consultancy reports and publications in preparation

Hidalgo et al. In prep. Technical inputs to the regional adaptation strategy to cope with the effects of climate change on fisheries in the Mediterranean Sea. Information paper for the SRC-EM 2021.

Jemaa S. at al. In prep. Otolith shape analysis to infer the stock structure of *Sardinella aurita* in the eastern Mediterranean

EastMed. In prep. Report of the online meetings of the Working Group on Fisheries Data Analysis. October - November 2020.

Hidalgo, M.; El-Haweet, A.; Tsikliras, A.C. and M. Tirasin. In prep. Vulnerability assessments of small and medium pelagic fisheries to climate change in the Eastern Mediterranean subregions. Supplementary information.

Hidalgo, M.; El-Haweet, A.; Tsikliras, A.C. and M. Tirasin. In prep. Vulnerability assessments of demersal fisheries to climate change in the Eastern Mediterranean subregions. Supplementary information.

Ünal, V.; Tosunoglu, Z.; M. Tirasin. In prep. The Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management in Gökçeada, Turkey: Baseline Report. FAO, Rome.

Vasconcellos, M and V. Unal (Eds). In prep. Transition to an ecosystem approach to fisheries in the Mediterranean: lessons from selected case studies. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper, FAO. Rome.

Nader, M., El Indary, S., Dagher, M.A., Vasconcellos, M., Majdalani, S., Dimech, M.; Lahoud, I.; Jawhar S. and C. Nammour. In prep. Lessons learned with EAF management planning for small-scale purse seine fisheries in Lebanon. In Vasconcellos, M and V. Unal (Eds). In prep. Transition to an ecosystem approach to fisheries in the Mediterranean: lessons from selected case studies. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper, FAO. Rome.