CRITICAL ECOSYSTEM PARTNERSHIP FUND

Ecosystem Profile

Mediterranean Basin Biodiversity Hotspot 2024 update

Extended Technical Summary

DECEMBER 2024

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1. INTRODUCTION

Founded in 2000, the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) has become a global leader in enabling civil society to participate in and influence the conservation of some of the world's hotspots. CEPF is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement (AFD), Conservation International (CI), the European Union (EU), Fondation Hans Wilsdorf, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Government of Japan, and the World Bank. As one of the founders, CI administers the global program and hosts the CEPF Secretariat.

The Mediterranean Basin Hotspot is the second largest hotspot in the world and the largest of the world's five Mediterranean-climate regions. It covers 2,085,292 km^2 and stretches west to east from Portugal to Jordan and north to south from northern Italy to Tunisia. It also includes parts of Spain, France, most of the Balkan States, Türkiye, parts the Middlea-East Region, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Algeria, as well as around 5,000 islands scattered around the Mediterranean Sea. West of the mainland, the hotspot includes a number of Atlantic islands: the Canaries, Madeira, the Selvagens, the Azores and Cabo Verde (Figure 1.1).

In 2012, CEPF started a five-year program of investment in the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot, which resulted in the award of 108 grants to 83 different organizations in 12 countries, with a total value of US$11 million. A second phase ran from 2017 through to 2024 (with extensions) and awarded a further 200 grants to 133 organizations in 13 countries, with a total value of US$13.9 million. Since the start of the investment, parts of the region experienced dramatic political change, collectively referred to as the Arab spring, which has had profound effects on stability and economies, and on the role of and opportunities for civil society in these countries. War has continued in Syria, insecurity is an obstacle to conservation activities in parts of Libya, and to a lesser extent elsewhere. The COVID-19 pandemic had a dramatic impact on lives across the hotspot and affected the delivery of the program, especially in 2020 and 2021. More recently, the dramatic evolution of the security and geopolitical situation in the Middle East, particularly in Palestine and Lebanon, has impacted inhabitants and organizations in this part of the hotspot.

The political upheaval and insecurity as well as global economic uncertainty and the pandemic, have impacted one of the region's major drivers of economic activity, tourism. The growing populations and consequent economic activity are increasing the demand for energy, water and infrastructure. Climate change is worsening the problem, and all the countries of the southern part of the hotspot experience water deficit. The increasing number and magnitude of water investments has caused irreversible damage to the fragile water cycle of small river basins in the hotspot.

Figure 1.1 Location of the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot

2. BACKGROUND

The ecosystem profile presents an overview of the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot in terms of its biodiversity conservation importance, major threats to biodiversity, and the socioeconomic, policy and civil society context in which conservation takes place. The profile also presents assessments of the implications of climate change for biodiversity conservation in the hotspot. It defines a suite of conservation outcomes at species, site and corridor scales, and identifies priorities for conservation investment within these.

The ecosystem profile concludes with a six-year investment strategy for civil-society-led conservation efforts in the hotspot. This strategy comprises a series of strategic funding opportunities, termed strategic directions, broken down into a series of investment priorities outlining the types of activities that will be eligible for funding. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) or individuals may propose projects that will help implement the strategy by addressing at least one of the investment priorities. The ecosystem profile does not include specific project concepts, as CSOs will develop these as part of their funding applications. Applicants are required to prepare detailed proposals identifying and describing the interventions and performance indicators that will be used to evaluate the success of their projects.

Table 2.1. Countries Covered by the Ecosystem Profile

Subregion	Country	Former CEPF Investment
Balkans	Albania	Yes
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Yes
	Kosovo	No
	North Macedonia	Yes
	Montenegro	Yes
Middle East	Iraq	No
	Jordan	Yes
	Lebanon	Yes
	Palestine	Yes
	Syria	No
North Africa	Algeria	Yes
	Egypt	Yes
	Libya	Yes
	Morocco	Yes
	Tunisia	Yes
Macaronesia	Cabo Verde	Yes
Türkiye	Türkiye	Not under Mediterranean investment

3. PHASES I AND II OF CEPF INVESTMENT: OVERVIEW AND LESSONS LEARNED

3.1 Investment strategy and outcomes for phase I and II

The ecosystem profile[1] that guided the first phase of CEPF investment in the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot was formulated in 2010, through an inclusive, participatory process that engaged more than 100 experts from civil society, donor and government stakeholders throughout the region. The ecosystem profile defined geographic priorities for CEPF investment, consisting of 70 KBAs eligible for CEPF investment, together with six priority corridors.

The CEPF investment strategy for the first phase comprised 13 investment priorities grouped under four strategic directions:

1. Promote civil society involvement in Integrated Coastal Zone Management to minimize the negative effects of coastal development in three priority corridors (Southwest Balkans; Cyrenaican Peninsula; and Mountains, Plateaus and Wetlands of Algerian Tell and Tunisia), and in 20 coastal and marine priority key biodiversity areas in other corridors
2. Establish the sustainable management of water catchments and the wise use of water resources with a focus on the priority corridors of the (1) Atlas Mountains, (2) Taurus Mountains, (3) Orontes Valley and Lebanon Mountains and (4) Southwest Balkans
3. Improve the conservation and protection status of 44 priority key biodiversity areas
4. Provide strategic leadership and effective coordination of CEPF investment through a regional implementation team

The first CEPF investment in the Mediterranean Basin was limited to 12 countries during phase I. National endorsements were not secured for Egypt and Türkiye, while the political and security situation prevented work in Syria. Croatia was briefly eligible, prior to its accession to the EU. The spending authority was initially set at $10 million but increased to US$11 million in 2013, with the commitment of additional funds from the MAVA Foundation. CEPF supported 108 projects in the 12 eligible countries, evenly distributed between large and small grants – the latter being grants below US$ 20,000 at that time. The role of Regional Implementation Team was attributed to a consortium of BirdLife International and BirdLife partners.

The final assessment[2] was produced in 2017. Some of the most important impacts in phase I were as follows:

Biodiversity Conservation

- Activities in 65 KBAs
- Strengthened management of 51 KBAs, covering 2,177,000 ha
- Eight new protected areas created, covering 27,651 ha
- Eleven new protected areas were declared as result of Phase I investment, covering 54,502 ha (some officially declared several years after close of the phase)
- Projects to support management of 30 protected areas. 80% of target protected areas with improved management (measured by Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool), covering 1,114,000 ha
- Improved management of natural resources in 1,485,000 ha of productive landscape, working with local communities

[1] www.cepf.net/resources/ecosystem-profile-documents/mediterranean-basin-ecosystem-profile-0
[2] www.cepf.net/resources/investment-analysis/mediterranean-basin-final-assessment

Strengthening Civil Society
- 91 beneficiary organizations
- 81% of grants to National/Local CSOs (60% of funding)
- 72% of organizations with increased capacity as monitored by Civil Society Capacity Tracking Tool (16% with an increase over 25%)
- Eight networks of civil society created, 11 supported in total.

Human well-being
- 48 projects included community-based conservation actions
- 12,000 people with increased revenues through livelihood activities
- 400 jobs created in ecotourism and small businesses around the region.

Enabling conditions.
- Assessment of freshwater KBAs for 12 countries of the Mediterranean Basin
- Assessment of Important Plant Areas in Lebanon and Cabo Verde
- 15 policies, laws or regulations influenced, mainstreaming biodiversity conservation in seven countries.

The second Ecosystem Profile was adopted in 2017, following an inclusive process to which more than 500 stakeholders contributed. The new strategy comprised six strategic directions:

1: Support civil society to engage stakeholders in demonstrating integrated approaches for the preservation of biodiversity in coastal areas.
2: Support the sustainable management of water catchments through integrated approaches for the conservation of threatened freshwater biodiversity.
3: Promote the maintenance of traditional land use practices necessary for the conservation of Mediterranean biodiversity in priority corridors of high cultural and biodiversity value.
4: Strengthen the engagement of civil society to support the conservation of plants that are critically endangered or have highly restricted ranges.
5: Strengthen the regional conservation community through the sharing of best practices and knowledge among grantees across the hotspot.
6: Provide strategic leadership and effective coordination of CEPF investment through a Regional Implementation Team.

Investment continued in same countries as in phase I, with new investments in Egypt and Palestine, the latter being included in the programme following a decision of CEPF Donor Council in October 2019. BirdLife International continued to assume the role or Regional Implementation Team. During this phase, CEPF invested close to US$13 million for 170 grants, out of which 154 (90%) were to local organizations - a significant evolution from phase I, when those represented 75% of grants. This trend reflects the increased capacity of local organizations in the region.

The final assessment[3] for phase II was produced in 2024. Some of the most important impacts in phase I were as follows:

Biodiversity Conservation
- 163 globally threatened species benefitted from conservation action.
- 96% of these species benefitted from science, research and monitoring activities.
- 57% benefitted from preservation/restoration of their habitats.
- 34% benefitted from direct species conservation actions.
- The management of 69 KBAs, covering 624,497 ha, was strengthened.
- The creation of 11 new protected areas and extension of four existing areas was supported, covering 8,420 ha in total.
- METTs measuring management effectiveness were completed for 52 protected areas, covering a total area of 973,108 ha. On average, the protected areas where CEPF supported CSOs' involvement reported an increase of their score by

[3] www.cepf.net/resources/investment-analysis/mediterranean-basin-phase-ii-final-assessment

9.3 points, from an average score of 41.4 initially to an average of 50.6 at the end of the phase.

Strengthening Civil Society

- 170 projects were supported (counting only those that ended before December 2023), which were implemented by 129 individual organizations.
- Of these 129 organizations, baseline and end-point Civil Society Tracking Tools were completed by 99 organizations, among which 78% reported an increase in their score.
- In addition, 57% of grantees (47 organizations) reported an increased integration of gender within their organizations (using the Gender Tracking Tool).
- 154 grants were awarded to local/national organizations (49 large grants and 105 small grants), representing 91% of the projects, or 89% of the budget for grant making.

Human Well-being

- 2,372 people, (854 women, 1518 men) received direct economic benefits.
- 205 communities, consisting of an estimated 150,000 people (54% male, 46% female), received benefits including improved access to natural resources, development of new market for local products, increase of ecotourism, protection of water sources, etc.

Enabling Conditions

- Grantees supported the official declaration of 39 policies or regulations.
- CEPF grantees leveraged a combined total of US$6,659,071 in additional funding for their projects and organizations.

3.2 Overview of lessons learned from phases I and II

The Mediterranean Basin has a broad and fluid donor environment. CEPF fills an essential niche, which currently centers on being one of the most significant contributors to biodiversity conservation through the channel of local and national CSOs. CEPF plays a catalytic role, with many examples where young organisations have completed CEPF grants and gone on to secure larger funds from other donors.

Phase II witnessed some impressive impacts where several projects of a complementary nature were operated by different orgnaisations in the same area, for example at Lake Skadar and the Ulcinj Salinas in Montenegro. Often, there has been great benefit from extending grants or awarding grants for follow-on activities. In considering priorities for phase III, strong consideration should be given to where follow up from phase II projects can still offer benefits.

Consultees appreciated that CEPF remained willing to invest in countries or parts of countries that were seen to be high risk. These gave CSOs the chance to build their capacity and gain experience in areas where other donors are reluctant to support work. In phase II, there were some excellent results achieved from projects in Palestine, while NGOs in Libya have delivered some good work, despite ongoing security concerns. Looking forwards, there may be similar opportunities to support CSOs in post-conflict/crisis situations over the next five years.

In some countries where investment has been possible in phase II, political and practical issues have nonetheless restricted the numbers of projects implemented. This is particularly true in Algeria and Egypt, where there are some restrictions on the operation of NGOs, as well as practical difficulties in disbursement of funds. Some work has been possible through grants to entities such as private companies and universities. These are important countries for biodiversity and CEPF should continue to explore ways to increase support to civil society there.

Capacity Building and Organizational Development
Phase II initiatives made a very strong contribution to capacity building, within the context of the development and implementation of projects but also more widely to organisations, as CEPF structured its approach to organizational development more effectively. Notable inputs have been to the development of organisational strategies and plans, the introduction of training events on project design and project proposal writing, and the training opportunities for young taxonomists. Good use has been made of the grantee network, as other more experienced individuals and institutions are often best placed to assist others.

Organisations have been assisted to form informal or formal networks of grantees at the local, national or sub-regional level. These networks work best when they have some clear objectives for where collaboration can add value. They may also form the framework for more structured efforts to build civil society capacity across the conservation sector. Exchange of experience has proven to be important for building the capacities of individual NGOs, as well as for developing a stronger "conservation community", able to influence policy making and business.

CEPF has played a strong role in promoting better equality of opportunity between women and men. Promoting conversations in training and project development workshops has been key to this, as has the comprehensive use of gender disaggregated data.

The investment has generated some excellent outcomes and some projects that, in themselves, have potential to be scaled up and replicated within their or neighbouring countries.

Thematic issues

The focus on KBAs and globally threatened species allows CEPF investment to be prioritized where it is most needed. Reviews and assessments found that the approaches to KBAs and strategic directions were about right. It will be important to retain flexibility where knowledge is incomplete, where security limits the ability to work and where key species occur outside of KBAs.

Influencing policy continued to be challenging for most CEPF grantees, in spite of some successes, notably to prevent damaging devlopment. Policy successes were often achieved with provincial and local levels of government. Supporting government to implement their own programs can be a more achievable prospect in some countries and is an effective way of establishing better relationships and building trust.

Private sector engagement in phase II continued to be limited, although there were some examples of grants successfully delivered by the private sector, who, in some cases, saw this as part of their corporate social responsibility, as they undertook work for much reduced revenues. At the local level, projects that supported the establishment of small local enterprises or cooperatives to enable local people to gain livelihood benefits from local production or tourism were often successful. Such enterprises also demonstrated the value and benefits to be derived from conservation practices.

It is essential to consider potential adaptation to climate change in all relevant projects, due to its significant impact on the success and sustainability of initiatives. This can be part of a wider approach to risk management, while contributing both to the well-being of communities and the conservation of ecosystems.

4. BIOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE HOTSPOT

The Mediterranean Basin is the third richest hotspot in the world in terms of its plant biodiversity (Mittermeier *et al.*2004), and one of the most important areas on Earth for endemic plants. It supports six terrestrial biomes: Mediterranean forests, woodlands and scrub is the most extensive, but there are smaller areas of dry broadleaf forests, mixed forests, coniferous forests, montane grasslands and deserts and xeric shrublands. There are also four freshwater biomes: coastal rivers, temperate floodplain rivers and wetlands, xeric freshwaters and endorheic (closed) basins, and large river deltas. The exceptional biodiversity of the hotspot includes:

- 10% of the world's **plants** (about 25,000 species), almost half of which are endemic to the hotspot (Blondel *et al.* 2010). Many of the endemic and restricted-range plants depend on anthropogenic habitats, which are a result of thousands of years of human management. As a result, several species are threatened by land-use changes and rural abandonment (Sirami *et al.* 2010).
- Almost 300 **mammal** species, 38 of which are terrestrial endemics.
- 534 **bird** species, including 63 endemic species. Millions of migratory birds cross the hotspot on the East Atlantic; Black Sea-Mediterranean and East Africa-West Asia flyways.
- Exceptional numbers of endemic **reptiles:** 117 of 308 species (almost 40%) are endemic. In the Macaronesian Islands (including Cabo Verde) 90% of reptile species are endemic.
- Very high numbers of **freshwater fish** species (622 in total), half of which are endemic to the hotspot, including many limited to single lake or river system.
- More than 600 **marine fish** species in the Mediterranean Sea, 74 of which are endemic to the sea. When the fish fauna of the eastern Atlantic part of the hotspot is included, the total for the hotspot is 1,122 species, 122 of them endemic to the hotspot.
- At least 629 species of **freshwater mollusks** are found in the region's ancient lakes, large river basins and artesian basins; 384 of them are endemic and many are threatened with extinction.

5. CONSERVATION OUTCOMES DEFINED FOR THE HOTSPOT

5.1 Introduction

Despite its uniqueness and fragility, the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot has to provide livelihoods for 200-300 million people in a region of global political and economic importance. Even with unlimited resources, it would be impossible to maintain all the species and ecosystems in the hotspot in their present state. Yet resources are highly limited, and conservation must compete for space with land uses that are more economically productive. Choices need to be made, therefore, about which species, sites and corridors are the most important, feasible or urgent to conserve. These priorities (or "conservation outcomes") constitute a long-term agenda for the hotspot, which needs support from governments, civil society and funders. Over the next six years, within the limits of the available budget and with a focus on civil society, CEPF cannot address more than a small proportion of them, in the 14 currently eligible countries. Chapters 12 and 13 define more specifically which outcomes will be supported by CEPF in the coming six years.

5.2 Species outcomes

Species outcomes are all those species that regularly occur in the hotspot and are classified as globally threatened. The identification of these species was based on the IUCN Red List, by selecting species that occur in the hotspot and are classified as Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable. Of the 5,786 species recorded from the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot for which there is a global assessment in the IUCN Red List, 1,311 (23%) are globally threatened (Table 5.1). Sixty percent of the threatened species are animals, with freshwater mollusks (320) and freshwater fishes (224), making up the greatest number of threatened species. In addition to the species listed in Table 5.1, 32 species from the hotspot are known to have become globally Extinct (EX), or Extinct in the Wild (EW): 11 freshwater fishes; two mammals; one reptile; 14 freshwater mollusks; and four plants.

The analysis highlights the importance and vulnerability of Mediterranean plants: only 7% of Mediterranean plants have been assessed for their conservation status (less in the south and east Mediterranean countries) but 28% of these are threatened.

Table 5.1 Globally threatened species in the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot

Group	No. of threatened species				% estimated completeness of IUCN Red List assessment at global (Mediterranean) level	% threatened species at global (Mediterranean) level
	CR	EN	VU	Total		
Vertebrates – total	**94**	**157**	**207**	**458**		
Amphibians	6	12	14	32	100	31
Birds	5	8	22	35	100	7
Freshwater fishes	60	83	81	224	96	37
Marine fishes **	7	15	46	68	100	7
Mammals	2	15	24	41	100	14
Reptiles	14	24	20	58	89	22
Invertebrates - total	**106**	**141**	**144**	**391**	**na**	**na**
Plants	**158**	**148**	**156**	**462**	7	28
TOTAL	**358**	**446**	**507**	**1,311**		

5.3 Site outcomes

KBAs are sites that make significant contributions to the global persistence of biodiversity. KBAs are identified for biodiversity elements for which specific sites contribute significantly to their global persistence, such as globally threatened species or ecosystems. The identification of KBAs uses multiple criteria and sub-criteria, each with associated thresholds.

The revision of the site outcomes analysis was limited to the countries covered by the update of the ecosystem profile. There have been some limited changes since the 2017 Ecosystem Profile. In total, 572 KBAs were identified for the 17 countries and territories in the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot covered by the update of the ecosystem profile. While KBAs were identified in all countries, there are marked differences between regions, with Türkiye having the highest number of KBAs, and Libya having the greatest proportion of its (rather restricted) land area within the hotspot included in KBAs (Table 5.2, Figure 5.1). Overall, the KBA data is often heterogeneous, as a result of KBA identification based on processes that took place at different time and most of them before adoption of standard methodology.

Figure 5.1 KBAs in the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot

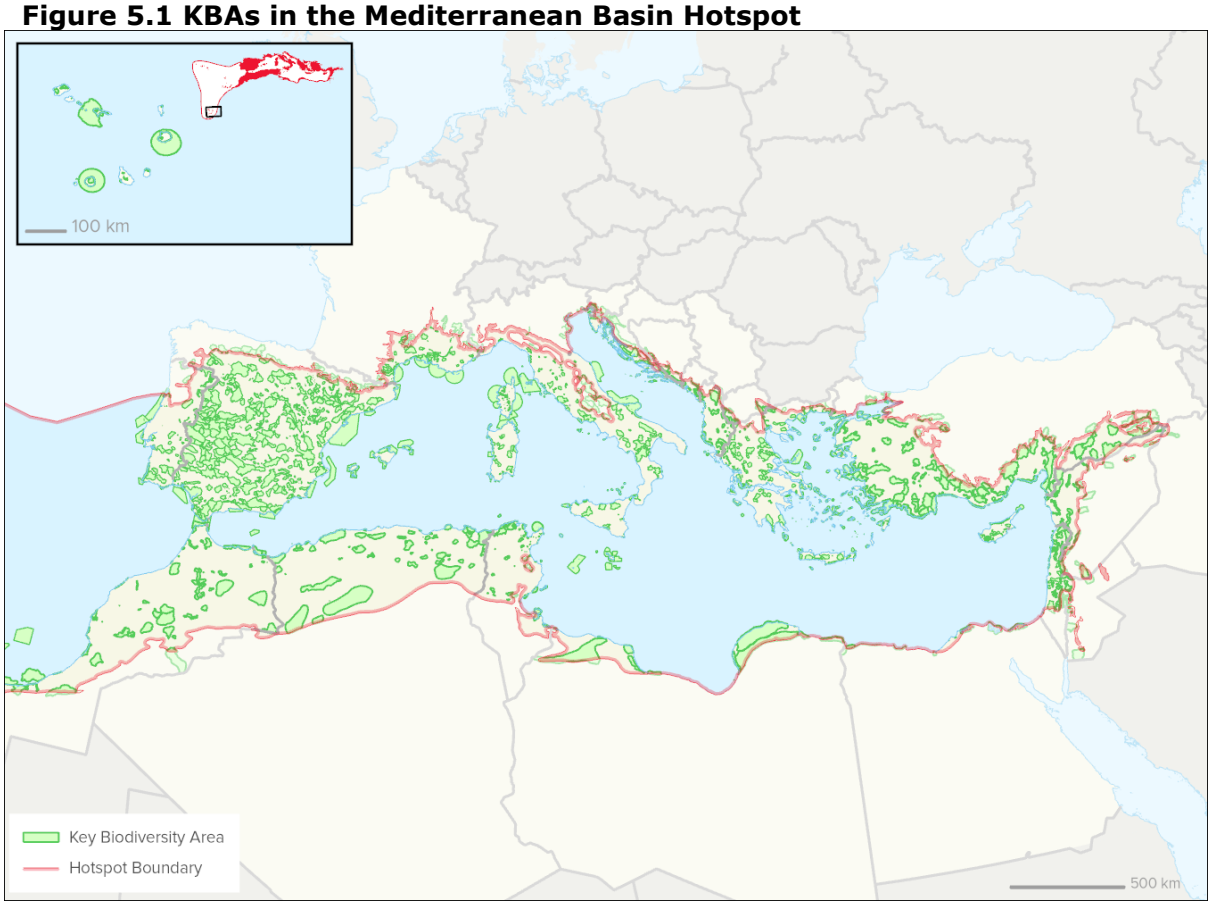


Table 5.2 Number and area of KBAs in the countries and territories of the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot covered by the ecosystem profile update

Country/Territory	No. of KBAs	Total land area of KBAs (km^2)	Total land area in Hotspot (km2)	Percentage of Hotspot land in KBAs
Albania	29	5,715	26,027	22%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	9	839	4,776	18%
Kosovo	1	132	227	58%
Montenegro	18	1,133	4,198	27%
North Macedonia	14	2,169	5,567	39%
Balkans sub-region	**71**	**9,988**	**49,794**	**24%**
Iraq	2	61	1,226	5%
Jordan	13	2,066	9,496	22%
Lebanon	19	3,431	10,133	34%
Palestine	20	1,433	5,062	28%
Syria	42	10,270	50,495	20%
Middle East sub-region	**96**	**17,262**	**76,412**	**23%**
Algeria	62	51,521	302,341	17%
Egypt	10	263	3,677	7%
Libya	14	35,396	63,918	55%
Morocco	69	35,350	325,299	11%
Tunisia	69	4,761	81,885	6%
North Africa sub-region	**224**	**127,291**	**777,120**	**16%**
Cabo Verde	**33**	669	4,058	16%
Türkiye	**148**	74,642	268,989	28%
TOTAL	**572**	**229,853**	**1,167,373**	**20%**

Notes: 1 = Figures consider only the terrestrial portion of the hotspot and exclude marine KBAs and portions of terrestrial KBAs that cover marine areas.

5.4 Corridor outcomes

Corridors represent higher spatial units necessary to maintain ecological and evolutionary processes at the landscape scale. In the 2010 Ecosystem Profile 17 Corridors were identified for the presence of highly threatened endemic species, key ecosystem services, importance in maintaining ecosystem resilience and their ability to safeguard the health and biological integrity of the hotspot. Of the 17 corridors identified in the 2010 ecosystem profile, five were modified and two were merged, in consultation with stakeholders at national and regional workshops. Hence, the 2016 update ecosystem profile includes 16 corridors (Table 5.3, Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2 Corridors in the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot

Table 5.3 Corridors and KBAs in the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot

Corridor	Number of KBAs	Total corridor area (km²)	Terrestrial area of corridor (km²)	Terrestrial area of KBAs (km²)	% of corridor in KBAs
Atlas Mountains	21	106,629	106,629	18,046	17%
Cabo Verde	33	42,742	4,058	669	16%
Coastal Atlantic Plains	10	13,297	12,863	2,267	18%
Cyrenaic Peninsula	10	30,109	27,211	22,372	82%
Dorsal and Tellian Atlas	51	82,650	82,083	13,325	16%
Eastern Adriatic	14	23,402	19,110	1,134	6%
Marmara Sea Basin	21	60,516	45,456	8,496	19%
Nile Delta Coast	6	14,759	11,114	1,590	14%
Northern Mesopotamia	22	62,011	62,011	19,165	31%
Oranie and Molouya	13	17,168	15,312	6,045	39%
Orontes Valley and Levantine Mountains	61	38,424	38,424	13,097	34%
Rif Mountains	11	15,488	15,174	1,930	13%
Saharian Atlas	5	61,902	61,902	21,935	35%
Southwest Balkans	53	37,808	35,280	8,574	24%
Taurus Mountains	98	167,616	153,698	52,503	34%
Wetlands of Tunisia and Libya	18	35,033	24,426	1,720	7%
Total	**447**	**809,554**	**714,751**	**192,867**	**24%**

6. SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXT OF THE HOTSPOT

6.1 Context

The Mediterranean region has a recorded history of more than 5,000 years and is the hub of past civilizations whose heritage and cultural landscape have made it unique in the world. The region is a highly fragmented region politically, demographically and socio-economically. There is north-south gap, with the economically rich states of the northern rim characterized by an ageing population, industrialized societies, expanding urban concentration and decreasing rural population. In these countries, membership of the EU, or candidacy status, has contributed to peace, development of a social market economy and economic and environmental convergence. In contrast, the Arab states of the Middle East and North Africa are significantly poorer, with young, rapidly growing populations and a larger proportion of the population living in rural areas and dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods. However urban populations are increasing, especially in coastal areas, as large numbers of people migrate from the poorer south to the richer north. These flows have intensified in recent years due to political tensions and insecurity following the "Arab spring" uprisings. The process of political and economic integration that has occurred between the countries of the EU has no equivalent the Middle East and North Africa, which continue to be politically unstable.

6.2 Demographic and social trends

The total population of the Mediterranean countries grew from 515 million in 2015 to over 560 million in 2023. Of this total, more than half live in the countries of the southern and eastern shores of the region and this proportion is expected to increase to three quarters by 2025. Population density in the coastal regions of the Mediterranean is on average 120 people/km2, as opposed to the national average of 58 people/km2. In hotspot countries covered by the ecosystem profile update, the highest concentration of population is in the coastal areas of Middle Eastern countries and parts of the North-African coast.

The region has traditionally been an area with strong migration flows into the EU member states, primarily from North African Maghreb countries and to a lesser extent from Western Balkan countries and Turkey. Over recent decades, these flows were dominated by economic migrants, but more recently and especially following the 'Arab spring' uprisings and wars in Syria and Libya, these flows have been more complex, involving large numbers of refugees.

Gender inequality, as measured by Gini coefficient, differs from North to South, with EU members states and Balkans ranking in the top 40 countries while most countries in the Eastern and Southern part of the hotspot rank over 100. However, the situation of women in most of these countries has improved since 2016 with respect to literacy rates and equal opportunities for educational enrolment and completion.

7. POLICY CONTEXT OF THE HOTSPOT

The portion of the hotspot that is the focus of this ecosystem profile comprises 16 states and territories. Government institutions, legal systems and the place of the environment within them have been influenced by the history of each country, which includes colonial periods and the influence of trade and interaction among Europe, Africa and the Middle East. In a complex geopolitical situation, borders are sometimes still disputed while the international community is divided on the status of Kosovo and Palestine.

The national constitutions of the hotspot countries generally refer to the right of people to enjoy a healthy environment, and some make specific reference to key environmental issues or responsibilities of the state. Environmental legislation and policy is diverse among the countries of the hotspot. The EU countries have a generally uniform and comprehensive body of legislation, based on European environment directives. The Balkan countries are moving towards more integrated approaches to environment and conservation, as part of their process to access the EU. Recent changes in North Macedonian legislation allow more efficient enforcement of environmental legislation.

Every country in the region has institutions responsible for the management of natural resources and conservation of nature but there is frequently a divide between agencies responsible for conservation of biodiversity, those responsible for forestry and agriculture, and those responsible for other aspects of the environment, such as water, waste management and licensing of exploitation.

Decentralization of authority to lower levels of Government happens to varying degrees across the hotspot, with examples of highly centralized management of protected areas, but also delegation to local Governments, and in some countries, NGOs are mandated to run protected areas.

Table 7.1 Protected areas coverage in the hotspot countries covered by the profile update

Country	Area of terrestrial protected areas (km^2)	% country in terrestrial protected areas
Albania	6,141	21.4
Algeria	107,462	4.6
Bosnia and Herzegovina	4,855	9.5
Cabo Verde	721	17.4
Egypt	128,871	13.1
Jordan	4,839	5.4
Kosovo	1,393	12.8
Lebanon	195	1.9
Libya	2,078	0.1
Montenegro	3,236	23.4
Morocco	8,905	2.2
North Macedonia	7,174	28.2
Palestine	615	9.9
Syrian Arab Republic	1,290	0.7
Tunisia	12,254	7.9
Türkiye*	21,654	2.8

* Data for Türkiye are incomplete. Some caveats on data reliability and consistency.

The protected areas network in countries eligible to CEPF is generally insufficient in coverage, and implementation of management plan often considered weak. The Marine Protected Areas cover a total surface area representing 8.3% of the Mediterranean Sea - but only 3.7%, if the Pelagos Sanctuary and the cetacean corridors, which have a low level of protection, are not taken into account – far from the international objectives.

As regards terrestrial areas, proportion of each country covered by PAs varies from less than 1% in Syria and Libya to over 20% in some Balkans countries (See Table 7.1). The 30x30 target would require substantial efforts from a number of Mediterranean countries.

Most countries (with exception of Kosovo, not a UN member) are signatories of the relevant international conventions, among which the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (IT PGRFA), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention), the World Heritage Convention (WHC) and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC).

8. CIVIL SOCIETY CONTEXT OF THE HOTSPOT

CEPF's definition of civil society includes many kinds of NGOs and voluntary organizations, philanthropic institutions, social movements, private businesses, media, academic and research organizations, and cooperatives. These groups may be international, national, or local.

In most countries of the hotspot there are examples of the work of: (1) international CSOs that are headquartered outside the hotspot but work within it (e.g., WWF, TNC, IUCN); (2) regional CSOs that are based in one hotspot country but also work in other hotspot countries (e.g., Medmaravis, Medasset and Tour du Valat); (3) national CSOs working within their own country; and (4) grassroots CSOs working on specific sites or within specific regions. There are multiple networks and collaborative relationships within and among these four groups, based on shared objectives, funding or exchange of skills and knowledge, as well as many initiatives for cross-border cooperation in nature conservation and sustainable development.

The opportunities for civil society to raise the profile of environmental issues, and contribute to addressing them, has generally increased. There is an increasing number of environmental NGOs in the countries covered by the ecosystem profile update, although the majority remain small and quite fragile.

Local associations for economic development often include aspects of sustainability and conservation of forest, wetlands, or soils. These associations are frequently active only at the village or community level can play an important role in driving local conservation action.

Academic interest in biodiversity conservation is well developed in most countries in the hotspot. In North Africa and the Middle East, especially where the NGO sector is under-developed, they may undertake some conservation actionor play the role of incubators for NGOs - calling to strengthen the partnership between universities and NGOs to share and develop scientific expertise, mobilize resources and involve people in community projects.

While there are some strong, sustainable CSOs in the countries covered by the ecosystem profile update, the overall picture is of relatively small CSO community, focused on local issues, rather poorly networked, and lacking sufficient capacity and resources to do the most effective job. Dependence on donor funding is generally high.

The existing funding for biodiversity conservation originates from a relatively small group of funding organizations that support civil society to play a role in the conservation of priority KBAs or wider landscapes. CSOs in the countries covered by the ecosystem profile update continue to have weaknesses in many areas, including human resources, management systems and strategic planning, partnerships, financial resources and transboundary cooperation. For many, the greatest need is in securing sustainable funding and better levels of international cooperation, related, in some cases, to the difficulty in receiving funds and support from abroad.

As regards private sector, despite some examples of positive actions, the large number of players and lack of organization of the sectors (particularly tourism as a major economic sector interested in natural resources) has proved an obstacle to the promotion of sustainable management and improved governance. The private sector needs a cultural shift, supported by policy stabilityand it is imperative to address information gaps, raise awareness about the necessity and long-term benefits of going green, and ensure an adequate provision of skills training. CSOs could play an important role in support to such shift.

9. THREATS TO BIODIVERSITY IN THE HOTSPOT

The Mediterranean Basin Hotspot countries have around 560 million inhabitants (UNDP, 2023), 33% of which live on the Mediterranean coast. Combined with visits by 220 million tourists a year, the region experiences one of the heaviest pressures from visitors and residents on the remaining natural habitats encountered anywhere on earth. Partly as a result, the region has the lowest percentage of natural vegetation remaining of any hotspot, less than 5%.

Activities associated with natural system modifications, pollution, and agriculture are the threats affecting the largest number of the threatened species in the hotspot. Species at risk of extinction in terrestrial environments are mainly threatened by agriculture (intensification and abandonment), urban development, natural systems modifications, and invasive species. In freshwater environments, natural system modifications (such as dams), pollution, climate change and invasive species are the main threats. For the threatened species in marine environments, the main threats identified were overharvesting, climate change and invasive species.

Pressure on water resources. Large areas of freshwater habitats have been lost, degraded, or fragmented, with a significant impact on biodiversity. Thirty-two percent of freshwater fishes in the Mediterranean Basin are threatened by dam construction. Water policies within the Mediterranean region are largely dominated by efforts to increase water supply and construct large water infrastructure but are reducing groundwater reserves and river and stream flows.

Fire and fire suppression. The Mediterranean Basin is one of the most fire-prone regions in the world and has a history of forest fires devastating large areas. Forest fires are expected to become more frequent and higher impact with climate change. Fragmentation and degradation have reduced the resilience of species populations to forest fires and made re-colonization of burnt areas harder.

Pollution. The main sources of pollution in the Mediterranean Basin are sewage and wastewater from urban sources, pesticide and nutrient additives from agriculture, heavy metals and oils from industrial facilities, toxic chemicals from mining operations, and solid waste from a variety of sources. Freshwater ecosystems, being the lowest points in each catchment, are the recipients of much land-based pollution, with impacts to their species occurring through pollution and eutrophication of surface and ground waters.

Agricultural intensification and land abandonment. Intensification is generally associated with high yields but also with significant changes to the natural environment, which result in loss of biodiversity. Land abandonment causes the loss of cultivated landscapes and corresponding habitats, such as steppes, montane grasslands, Iberian dehesas and Mediterranean shrublands.

Infrastructure and residential development. Urbanization, associated with population migration and the development of the tourist industry, has exposed previously sparsely inhabited areas of coastline to intense pressure from land-use change.

Transport infrastructure and service corridors. These developments cause fragmentation of natural habitats, which has negative consequences for habitat selection, abundance and species diversity, and limits or disrupts migration and dispersal of individuals.

Biological resource use. This includes logging, overfishing, hunting of birds and mammals, and collection of commercially valuable wild plants.

Invasive alien species. These species pose a particular threat to marine and freshwater systems, but also to terrestrial plants.

The underlying drivers of threats include population growth and movements, rapid economic growth, increased consumption and unequal access to resources, poor governance of natural resources, and under-valuation of ecosystem services in decision making.

10. CLIMATE CHANGE

The Mediterranean Basin climate is characterized by cold, wet winters and prolonged hot, dry summers. In recent decades, there has been an increase in hot days across the northern Mediterranean and an overall increase in dryness. At the same time, the southern Mediterranean has experienced annual and seasonal warming trends that are significantly beyond the range of changes due to natural variability, and some areas have experienced a strong decrease in the amount of winter and early spring precipitation. Climate models, under all emissions scenarios, show that temperatures in the Mediterranean Basin will increase – up to from 3.5 to 7°C higher than 1961-1990 levels by the end of the century for the eastern Mediterranean, Middle East, and North Africa. The region is also likely to receive less annual precipitation, resulting in a consistent increase in drought area. Impacts are estimated to be around 20% more severe in the Mediterranean than for the global average.

In marine ecosystems, the Mediterranean Sea is characterized by a homogenous layer of water below about 300 meters, which remains at a constant temperature and salinity year-round. Over the last decade, however, the temperature and salinity of this layer has significantly risen year on year. Surface temperatures have also been changing, with an observed increase of more than 1°C since the 1980s. By the end of the 21st century, sea surface temperatures are predicted to rise by an average of 2.5°C relative to today.

Climate change poses both direct and indirect risks to human activities, such as agricultural productivity, health and infrastructure. Conserving and restoring ecosystems can be an effective way of reducing emissions and increasing the size of natural carbon sinks, while supporting ecosystem-based adapation. While most efforts have focused on natural forests or forest plantations, other ecosystems such as *Posidonia* seagrass meadows, wetlands, grasslands, and agro-ecosystems are also important for climate mitigation while playing arole in adaptation. There is considerable potential to deliver ecosystem-based approaches to jointly deliver on both mitigation and adaptation, while supporting conservation and other sustainable development objectives. This will, however, require a much more integrated approach to policy making and implementation.

In southern Europe, including the Mediterranean Basin, there is projected to be a great reduction in diversity of plant, bird, and mammal assemblages, which will not be offset by gains expected in regions of high latitude or altitude, resulting in a trend towards homogenization across the continent. Mountain ecosystems and wetlands are the most threatened but there may also be significant changes in the species composition of forests. Shrublands are expected to increase significantly. In marine ecosystems, continued warming and changes in salinity will cause loss of deep, cold-water species and favor more adaptable and widespread species, many of them from the Atlantic.

Actions that can be taken or promoted by civil society include:

- Strengthening the management of existing protected areas (and establishing new ones) as refugia for species under pressure from climate change.
- Improving connectivity among protected areas and other key sites to provide opportunities for species to migrate to more suitable climates.
- Conserving and restoring ecosystems to reduce emissions and increase carbon sinks.
- Demonstrating ecosystem-based approaches to adaptation, such as sustainable management, conservation and restoration of ecosystems.

11. ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT CONSERVATION INVESTMENT

In the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot, biodiversity conservation remains severely underfunded, largely due to limited governmental prioritization. Non-EU countries in the region usually allocate insufficient budget resources to environmental protection. Protected area systems (a key pillar of conservation efforts) are structurally underfunded (with the partial exception of Jordan). In many countries, biodiversity is often overlooked in favor of economic development, which, in turn, fails to fully account the importance of biodiversity for ecosystem services and the potential for sustainable livelihoods.

Biodiversity-related ODA in the region appears to be gradually decreasing, following political priorities set up by most bilateral donor countries. What 'environmental' funding does exist is often direct climate issues which is vital but does not always directly or indirectly assist the emergencies facing nature. One exception is Morocco, which has launched an ambitious plan for a reform of forest and protected areas administration, with support from the international community.

The Mediterranean Basin receives little attention from international conservation foundations, which tend to prioritize other regions, particularly tropical areas. The perceived complexity and political instability of the Mediterranean region make it less attractive to these foundations.

Private sector has a limited engagement in conservation in the hotspot. Although tourism plays a major role in the Mediterranean economy and depends heavily on preserving natural landscapes, the sector is highly fragmented, making it difficult to channel resources toward biodiversity conservation. CSR initiatives, while promising, remain sporadic and underdeveloped. Carbon finance also faces limitations in the Mediterranean Basin, due to the region's patchy, dry forests with low carbon storage potential. However, blue carbon initiatives, in marine and coastal ecosystems, may offer future funding opportunities.

CSOs could therefore play an instrumental role in advancing mobilization of funding for biodiversity conservation. CSOs act as critical agents for advocacy, influencing national and local governments to allocate specific funding and resources for conservation initiatives. They also engage with private businesses to foster partnerships that can enhance conservation efforts at the local level. Furthermore, CSOs are often at the forefront of pioneering climate funding mechanisms, which can bolster conservation financing through innovative approaches. The case for international support to local CSOs remains strong therefore, in order to advance towards ensuring sufficient funding for conservation.

Nevertheless, financial sustainability for these organizations has proven difficult to attain. National and subnational authorities rarely support CSOs directly, and opportunities for CSOs to access international public donors funding is reduced, due to the complexity of the procedures involved, and because most funding is dedicated to governments.

Resource mobilization in years to come will require strengthened collaboration among all donors and mechanisms in the region, to maximise impact, plus a coordinated effort to convince other organizations to contribute to this effort. In parallel, domestic CSOs need support to develop the necessary capacities to prepare, through partnerships, larger proposals, and access more diverse sources of funding, allowing them to address the conservation challenges in the region.

12. CEPF NICHE FOR INVESTMENT

12.1 Eligible countries

CEPF support is available for conservation action within the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot in those countries that are signatories to the CBD and also World Bank client members, excluding *de facto* EU Member States and their territories and the independent countries of Mediterranean Europe (Andorra, Monaco, San Marino, etc.). The political and security situation in some countries also currently precludes effective grant making to civil society there, although this may change during the coming six years. Table 12.1 summarizes the eligibility of hotspot countries for CEPF support as of December 2024. CEPF will focus primarily on countries which benefitted from investment previously, and explore options to extend work in Kosovo, Iraq, Syria and Türkiye during the investment phase. Any extension would be subject to prior approval by CEPF Donor Council.

Table 12.1 Eligibility of countries covered by the ecosystem profile update for CEPF support

Subregion	Country	Eligibility
Balkans	Albania	Eligible
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Eligible
	Kosovo	Not currently eligible, not a signatory to the CBD
	North Macedonia	Eligible
	Montenegro	Eligible
Middle East	Iraq	Theoretically eligible (small area included in the hotspot)
	Jordan	Eligible
	Lebanon	Eligible
	Palestine	Eligible
	Syria	Not currently eligible due to the political situation
North Africa	Algeria	Eligible
	Egypt	Eligible
	Libya	Eligible
	Morocco	Eligible
	Tunisia	Eligible
Macaronesia	Cabo Verde	Eligible
Türkiye	Türkiye	Eligible but no grant making during previous phases

12.2 Guiding principles for CEPF action

Based on lessons learned from previous investment phases and taking into account the evolution of donors' landscape in the hotspot, the CEPF niche is defined around four guiding principles

Supporting the development of local and national organizations in a regional context

The status of civil society in the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot has evolved in recent years. Civil society is increasingly diverse, influential, and engaged in conservation at both site and policy levels in most countries across the hotspot. This is particularly the case in North Africa, where a new civil society has emerged in some countries, such as Tunisia, Morocco, and Libya. However, limited internal capacity, inadequate funding and,

in some cases, restrictive policies and limited funding opportunities limit the ability of CSOs to take full advantage of opportunities and address the most urgent conservation needs.

In this context, there is a clear rationale for CEPF to continue to focus support to local and national civil society, with the objective of strengthening the organizational capacities of individual organizations and fostering the emergence of a conservation community in the eligible countries.

CEPF will support actions that build the capacity of civil society and lead to the emergence of strong effective organizations and a cadre of conservation leaders. Self-identification of capacity-building and organizational development needs by grantees will be an integral part of the CEPF grant-making process, with the RIT playing an important role in supporting CSOs to identify their own needs and goals and support them in achieving their development goals.

Strategic engagement with the private sector
Key lessons for engagement with the private sector are: start at the local scale, with businesses that are rooted in the community and landscape; seek opportunities to promote the image of the industry/business at the same time as delivering conservation benefits; gather data that demonstrate to business the financial benefits of the action; and be more creative in seeking opportunities for in-kind support from business (meeting venues, assistance with transportation, etc.).

CEPF will continue to explore options for links with more global companies through its own networks and those of its donor partners and grantees, but it is anticipated that grantees will continue to build on local linkages at the project level.

Building on local actions to achieve policy impacts
With the majority of CEPF-funded projects expected to focus on impacts at specific sites and their surrounding landscapes, there is a need for complementary actions to address the wider policy, funding and programmatic issues that affect the impact of the project, as well as the potential for scaling up and wider adoption of successful approaches. As discussed, it has been challenging for grantees to address these issues at the project level, although there have been some notable successes. There are important roles for the RIT, partners and grantees to play in addressing these wider issues.

Promote the role and acceptance of the value of CSOs more generally
The level of openness towards CSOs, as expressed through official regulations and unofficial attitudes, varies widely across the countries of the hotspot (see Chapter 8). Promoting the value of civil society in contributing to sustainable development can make governments more receptive to CSOs' messages, and the public more likely to support these organizations. CEPF has a specific role to play in demonstrating how CSOs have supported positive environmental and social agendas in countries across the hotspot, including how they can assist governments in meeting obligations under international conventions, and in mobilizing public participation in environmental programs. Where this is still suspicion of the role of NGOs, emphasizing their ability to assist governments in policy and informing decision-making is likely to be the most effective way of building mutual trust.

12.3 Background to the strategic directions

CEPF will continue to support actions that directly improve the conservation status of KBAs, and other places holding important populations of globally threatened species. The focus on priority sites is important for ensuring that projects deliver concrete outcomes for conservation, based on positive relationships with specific stakeholder groups and administrative arrangements. This site focus does not preclude support for more

catchment/corridor-scale or policy-focused work but emphasizes that such work should have clear benefits for site conservation and should be grounded in site-level experience.

The priority ecosystem and species for the third phase of CEPF investment in the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot are as follows:

Coastal and marine ecosystems.
These include a diverse range of marine ecosystems, as well as beaches, wetlands, estuaries, coastal forests, and garrigue and maquis heathlands. These are among the most threatened ecosystems in the hotspot, due to intense pressure from economic development and population growth It is recognized that there are also gaps in support for wider marine conservation and a lack of knowledge and capacity to address issues in many countries.

Of all aspects of the CEPF investment niche, marine conservation most obviously requires a high degree of regional collaboration, since there is such a high degree of habitat connectivity, which offers both threats and opportunities. The interrelations in terms of pollution, fishing and species distribution and movements mean that collaboration is essential.

Freshwater ecosystems.
Large numbers of single-site and locally endemic threatened species have been identified from the hotspot's rivers, lakes and cave systems. Freshwater systems tend to be underrepresented in protected area systems but are highly threatened in a region where fresh water is the most critical ecological resource and anticipated to be most severely affected by climate change.

Agricultural and cultural landscapes.
The unique human history of the hotspot means that many of the threatened species found there are dependent on anthropogenic habitats maintained by cultural management practices, such as extensive grazing and nature friendly cultivation. This creates an alignment between biodiversity conservation and the maintenance of traditional resource management systems, something that conventional protected areas do not necessarily deliver effectively. Cultural practices persist, particularly in mountainous areas where land-use changes and industrialization have been less intense. There are increasing pressures on such systems across the region, however, which can take opposite trajectories. While some landscapes are facing pressure for increasing intensification, habitat loss and overgrazing, others may face abandonment and loss of the management practices which sustained them. CEPF will sustain effort in the corridors where previous investment took place during the phase II, to build on previous achievements.

Conservation of plants and plant communities
The Mediterranean Basin Hotspot is defined by the number of endemic plant species in the hotspot. The hotspot is exceptional both for its diversity of plants and for the high degree of threat they face. The level of threat faced by plants and the lack of attention given to their specific conservation needs justifies an explicit focus on this group. Resources continue to be limited for the plant conservation community, and there is still a lack of capacity and few conservation CSOs who engage in plant conservation. CEPF will continue to support research and training to build levels of knowledge and expertise but wants to ensure that this knowledge is used to stimulate conservation actions for a greater number of highly threatened plants and plant communities, increasing the strength of the botanical community in the region.

13. CEPF INVESTMENT STRATEGY AND PROGRAMMATIC FOCUS, 2025-2030

While supporting conservation actions along the 3 ecosystems and plants above-mentioned, there will be an increased emphasis on strengthening capacities and on organizational development, to move successful organizations along the pathway to sustainability. CEPF wishes to grow civil society's effectiveness, by encouraging networking and collaboration at national and regional scales.

CEPF also wants to encourage projects that achieve a more effective level of protection for sites and species. This may include formal protected areas, especially in the marine environment, where a gap was identified in the capacity and resources available to establish new Marine Protected Areas. However, there are also many opportunities to move sites towards other forms of protection via Community Conservation Areas (CCAs) or Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECMs), to contribute to Mediterranean countries' efforts in meeting Target 3 of the Global Biodiversity Framework (the "30x30 target").

Table 13.1 summarizes the strategic directions and investment priorities that make up the CEPF investment strategy. These are further described in following sections.

Table 13.1 Strategic Directions and Investment Priorities for CEPF in the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot, 2025-2030

Strategic Directions	Investment Priorities
1. Support local partnerships for conservation of globally important coastal biodiversity $ 4,500,000	1.1. Support involvement of civil society in the management of Marine Protected Areas and realize opportunities to establish new ones
	1.2. Advance the protection, restoration and improved management of coastal wetlands, with the participation of local stakeholders
2. Promote the values of freshwater ecosystems and advance their protection, restoration and improved management $ 3,200,000	2.1. Document and promote recognition of the freshwater biodiversity and ecosystem service values of Key Biodiversity Areas
	2.2. Advance protection, restoration and improved management of important sites for freshwater biodiversity, with the participation of local stakeholders
3. Promote traditional land-use practices that maintain biodiversity in priority corridors $ 3,750,000	3.1. Support traditional resource managers to follow land management practices that maintain biodiversity in mountain landscapes
	3.2. Document and promote traditional land-use practices and Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures among local and national governments
4. Strengthen the engagement of civil society to support conservation of threatened plants and plant communities $ 2,200,000	4.1. Build the capacity of the botanical community to increase knowledge and skills and engage in applied conservation of threatened plants
	4.2. Secure better implementation of plant conservation in the management of protected areas
	4.3. Take innovative actions for conservation of threatened plants, working with landowners and land users

Strategic Directions	Investment Priorities
	4.4. Improve conservation efforts for wild crop relatives, medicinal plants and other wild plants of economic and cultural value
5. Facilitate the development of a robust and resilient community of conservation Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) $ 1,000,000	5.1. Provide support to targeted conservation CSOs engaged in a process of organizational development
	5.2. Enhance the collective strength and ability of conservation CSOs at national and regional levels
6. Provide strategic leadership and effective coordination of conservation investment through a regional implementation team $ 2,750,000	6.1. Support a broad constituency of civil society groups working across institutional and political boundaries towards achieving the shared conservation goals described in the ecosystem profile
TOTAL BUDGET **$ 17,400,000**	

Underpinning these strategic directions are several cross-cutting priorities, which applicants will be asked to consider and incorporate into their project designs where relevant.

On capacity building and development of organizations

A. Building civil society capacity to contribute to the implementation and improvement of national and local policy and legislation. This will include applied training in policy and advocacy, and engagement with government.
B. Building civil society capacity at all levels, from individuals to organizations to the sector as a whole. Capacity building for local community groups and cooperatives is also important; CEPF expects projects to consider this where relevant, to ensure long-term sustainability.
C. Promoting gender equality and empowerment. Gender is a critical factor in many conservation and natural resource management decisions at local and national level, as well as for social justice. CEPF expects grantees to look for opportunities to mainstream gender issues into their organizations and their work, and to ensure that women's perspectives are considered when planning and implementing projects.
D. Incorporating education and awareness actions that contribute to project objectives and promote necessary changes in consumer and producer behaviour.

On sites and species conservation

E. Maintaining a strong focus on conservation and management of KBAs as a key conservation tool, resolving or lessening threats, and moving them towards more effective levels of protection – being through protected areas or other forms of conservation measures. Where previous projects have been successful, CEPF will be open to supporting further work at the same sites, to consolidate and scale up achievements.
F. Improving the status of globally threatened species and ecosystems in the hotspot. Beyond Strategic Direction 4, with its explicit focus on plants, CEPF expects all site-level projects to focus on the needs of globally threatened species, and to improve their populations and status where possible. Priorities for action will be those species listed as globally threatened (i.e., Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable) on the IUCN Red List, as well as species that meet the criteria for globally threatened but have not yet been formally assessed using the IUCN Red List methodology. CEPF also encourages work on lesser-known species, especially among plants.

G. Ensuring that all data collected through research and surveys are well managed and accessible to everyone, and that existing and new data are used to inform conservation action. All species targeted by CEPF projects should undergo a Red List assessment (or reassessment, if the previous assessment is more than 10 years old) and be included in the IUCN Red List. Grantees are encouraged to submit any scientific papers prepared with support from CEPF grants to open-access journals.
H. Addressing threats to Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) at source. While KBAs remain CEPF's core tool for identifying priorities for site conservation, consideration will be given to projects that seek to address issues emanating from outside KBA boundaries, such as threats to a wetland coming from upstream.
I. Restoring degraded ecosystems in and around KBAs. CEPF will consider supporting efforts to restore areas inside or outside existing and potential KBA boundaries that, once restored, will contribute to their function. Such activities can be very costly, so preference will be given to projects that offer good value for money, either because the issue can be resolved fairly easily, or where good restoration practice can be demonstrated and show the potential for scaling up by other agencies or donors.

On climate change mitigation and adaptation

J. Ensuring that all projects take account of the implications of climate change and, where possible, contribute to climate resilience and adaptation.
K. Building climate resilience and adapting to the effects of climate change. So-called 'nature-based solutions' can be designed into projects and can also offer social and economic benefits. These are further discussed in Chapter 10.

On portfolio development and management

L. Collaborating with organizations or individuals with different skills, including those whose remit is broader than nature conservation alone. This includes integrating individual projects into local, national or regional networks.
M. Integrating projects and promoting collaboration among organizations, particularly through encouraging clusters of projects (under one or more strategic directions) working in the same corridor or KBA.
N. Considering long-term sustainability from early project design onwards. CEPF encourages projects that aim to build on the successes and lessons of projects supported under earlier phases of investment by CEPF and other donors.
O. Involving private sector in projects, where appropriate. CEPF is especially keen to support projects that develop locally owned enterprises or cooperatives that support site conservation and local communities, as well as those that help to improve access to markets and value of such products.
P. Monitoring of the impact of projects, establishing clear baselines and explaining how progress will be measured. Projects should be committed to the reporting and dissemination of lessons learned from the design, implementation of and follow up to projects.

Strategic Direction 1. Support local partnerships for conservation of globally important coastal biodiversity

Main focus, justification and impact

This strategic direction addresses some of the most threatened sites and ecosystems in the hotspot: those in coastal zones. Coastal ecosystems are under increasing pressure from human population growth and migration, the growth of tourism, and associated urbanization and pressure on land and water resources (Chapter 9). The specific threats in coastal zones are: (1) direct over-exploitation of biodiversity (over-exploitation of

coastal woodlands, over-fishing, intensive hunting of migratory birds, collection of plants, etc.); (2) direct damage to sites through conversion of coastal habitats to intensive agricultural land, building land, tourism and infrastructure, as well as mineral extraction and invasive fishing techniques; and (3) actions that take place outside key sites but impact them, such as abstraction of water, dumping of solid waste and water pollution.

Based on the lessons learned from earlier phases, the CEPF investment strategy for the third phase makes the following shifts of emphasis:

- Support more work in marine areas within national jurisdictions, recognizing the important threats in these areas, the importance of increasing the number of new MPAs, and the need to build more capacity among CSOs to foster their engagement in conservation;
- Give more emphasis to coastal wetlands, which are highly diverse habitats that have seen their original extent dramatically reduced and face increasing threats across the Mediterranean.

The investment priorities under this strategic direction have been designed to support local partners engaged in other regional conservation actions, among them the MedFund, the Mediterranean Alliance for Wetlands, MedPAN and the RAC/SPA (Chapter 8).

Geographic focus

The KBA identification process in the marine realm is still far from complete in the Mediterranean Basin. Currently, "marine" KBAs are mostly extensions of KBAs primarily assessed for their terrestrial biodiversity or centered on existing MPAs for which data are available. As such, at the time of this profile update, KBAs cannot be used as a prioritization tool for Investment Priority 1.1, which aims at supporting identification and establishment of new MPAs. Similarly, Investment Priority 1.2 on coastal wetlands is expected to respond to emerging threats and support protection and restoration when opportunities arise; considering the rarity and global importance of Mediterranean coastal wetlands, setting predetermined priorities would prove counterproductive.
This strategic direction will be open for all coastal areas throughout the hotspot that meet KBA criteria, even if the official recognition as a KBA has not been secured yet. In some cases, if data are not yet available, initial activities will focus on assessing the biodiversity value of the site, as a prerequisite for further action. This will be particularly important for sites supported under Investment Priority 1.2, to ensure that any work on promotion of new MPAs supported by CEPF takes place in areas of global importance. The list of coastal KBAs in eligible countries is provided as Annex 2.1, for information.

Investment Priority 1.1 Support involvement of civil society in the management of Marine Protected Areas and realize opportunities to establish new ones

Coastal and marine ecosystems in the hotspot, including protected areas, are often used for activities like fishing, agriculture, and hunting. Other resources, such as sand and gravel, may also be extracted, and there are non-exploitative activities, like recreation, that impact habitats and species.

This investment priority will focus on negotiating improvements to management regimes by enhancing planning, raising awareness and enforcing agreed-upon rules. At the same time, projects should aim to improve the conservation status of sites that are not already designated as MPAs. This could involve moving towards formal MPA designation or adopting alternative mechanisms, such as community conservation areas or seasonal/permanent no-take zones. Where feasible, these efforts will promote sustainable use and may introduce new practices that increase the value of sites to local stakeholders, encouraging better management.

Such work is complementary to other regional initiatives, such as the MedFund, which supports recurrent costs of existing MPAs, or MedPAN, which promotes networking and coordination among MPAs and MPA managers.

As noted above, eligible sites for this Investment priority will be KBAs with a marine portion, anywhere in the Mediterranean Hotspot, as well as sites that meet the KBA criteria but have not been officially recognized yet. Specific attention will be given to sites that are not yet supported by other international donors or initiatives, with the objective of extending the network of sites benefitting from local conservation action.

Investment Priority 1.2 Advance the protection, restoration and improved management of coastal wetlands, with the participation of local stakeholders

While most coastal ecosystems are threatened, coastal wetlands have one of the highest rates of loss of all habitats and are under a high degree of continued stress in all areas. This is often due to infrastructure development and land use associated with tourism, expanding agriculture or urbanization, recreational land use, or management challenges associated with climate change. In some cases, neglect or abandonment may exacerbate impacts or provide opportunities for ecosystem restoration. The value of coastal wetlands, both for nature but also as potential nature-based solutions for regulation of water, control of flooding or prevention of erosion, are still underappreciated.

Actions under this investment priority may be carried out in conjunction with ones under Investment Priority 1.1 and may include efforts to establish or expand protected areas or to collaborate with public and private sector actors to promote conservation as part of ensuring a healthy natural environment.

This investment priority has been designed to support local partners' engagement in other regional initiatives, such as the MedWet and the Mediterranean Alliance for Wetlands, in particular through expanding their participation in the Red Alert and Green Light initiatives. Projects will also be supportive of the efforts under the Ramsar convention (Chapter 7).

Strategic Direction 2. Promote the values of freshwater ecosystems and advance their protection, restoration and improved management

Main focus, justification and impact

Nearly one-third of the Critically Endangered species assessed in the hotspot are freshwater animals and plants (Chapter 5). They occur in a wide range of freshwater ecosystems, including rivers, lakes, karst cave systems and ephemeral dryland water courses. The need for fresh water for agriculture and human consumption, especially in North Africa and the Middle East, is one of the most persuasive reasons for the sustainable management of natural resources. Nevertheless, the hotspot's freshwater ecosystems are poorly represented in national protected area networks, they are under pressure from over-use and pollution, and the species that live in them suffer from over-exploitation and disturbance (see Chapters 4 and 9). Moreover, climate change is likely to make these problems worse (see Chapter 10).

Some of the actions required to address these problems are national or international in scale and cannot be tackled effectively by CSOs alone. CEPF investments in the first two phases showed, however, that CSOs can be effective when working at defined sites and with relevant authorities, such as protected area management agencies, or agencies charged with river basin management or water resource conservation. Once sustainable use of water resources is agreed, there can be strong alignment between the needs of

threatened biodiversity and human development (e.g., for adequate supplies of clean water).

In response to the lessons learned from earlier phases, Investment Priority 2.1 will continue to address the need for improved knowledge on important sites for freshwater biodiversity in and around KBAs, using this as an opportunity to build capacity for research and conservation action on freshwater organisms: an area in which clear gaps in capacity were recognized during consultations. Beyond that, Investment Priority 2.2 will focus on site-based action, working with local stakeholders to mitigate threats to KBAs and their constituent species. This investment priority will aim to enhance the management of freshwater ecosystems, by improving their protection status where possible but also by ensuring existing protected areas give higher priority to freshwater ecosystems that occur within their boundaries. This will include seeking and taking opportunities to restore degraded ecosystems within and connected to KBAs.

Geographic focus

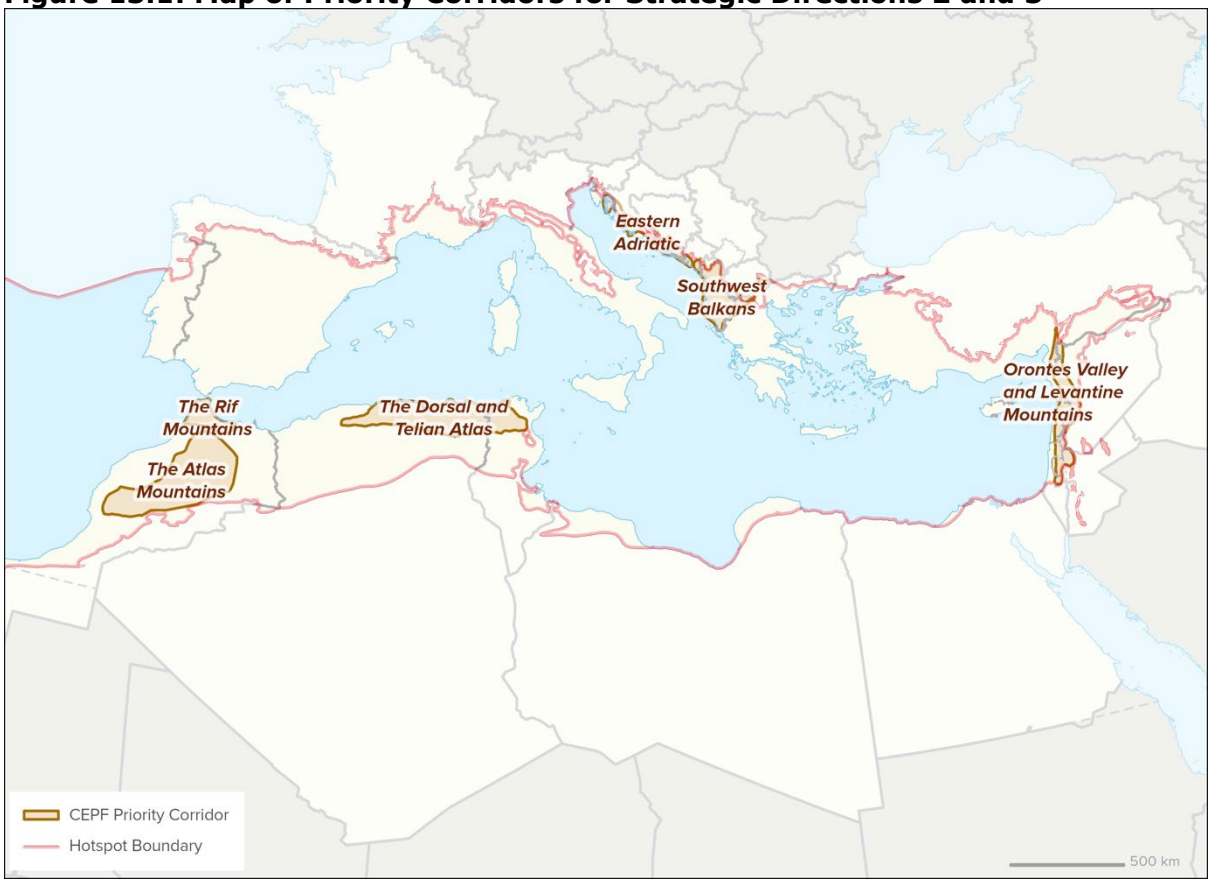
The assessment of freshwater biodiversity in the Mediterranean Basin led by IUCN in 2016 (see Chapter 3) led to identification of priority catchment management zones in the region, showing that some parts of the hotspot have a specific responsibility for preservation of threatened freshwater biodiversity. Within eligible countries, most of these zones at located in six conservation corridors, which will be the focus of CEPF intervention (Table 13.2, Map 13.1). KBAs with significant representation of freshwater ecosystems that are located within these corridors will be considered priority sites for CEPF investment under this strategic direction. As noted above, projects may work in the wider catchment beyond the KBA boundary, either because this is necessary to maintain the integrity and value of the KBA, or because there is an opportunity to restore areas beyond the existing boundary. Project proposals should explain the relevance of any actions in the wider catchment to the integrity of the KBA.

Table 13.2 Corridors prioritized for CEPF support under Strategic Direction 2

Corridor	Eligible Countries	Corridor area (km^2)	# of priority KBAs
Orontes Valley and Levantine Mountains	Türkiye*, Syria*, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine	38,433	31
The Atlas Mountains	Morocco	106,691	21
The Rif Mountains	Morocco	15,488	9
The Dorsal and Tellian Atlas	Tunisia, Algeria	82,633	45
Eastern Adriatic	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro	23,402	14
Southwest Balkans	Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo*	37,808	50

**No investment foreseen in these countries for this Strategic direction*

Figure 13.1: Map of Priority Corridors for Strategic Directions 2 and 3



Nevertheless, data analysis also shows that freshwater biodiversity is still poorly known in many parts of the hotspot, possibly leading to bias in terms of priority setting and limiting ability for conservation action. Although many projects supported by CEPF in the previous phase helped reduce this knowledge gap, consultations conducted during the update of the ecosystem profile demonstrated that this need is still there. Also, emerging threats at sites important for freshwater biodiversity may call for urgent actions to document the value of places that were not considered threatened and prioritized previously. For this reason, Investment Priority 2.1, on research and assessment, will be open to other KBAs in the region with the objective to reduce this gap.

Investment Priority 2.1 Document and promote recognition of the freshwater biodiversity and ecosystem service values of Key Biodiversity Areas

Information on the distribution, population and threat status of freshwater biodiversity within KBAs remains, in many cases, inadequate to allow identification of the most urgent sites for conservation action, or to act as a baseline against which to evaluate improvements. In addition, the biological, social and economic values of ecosystem services from intact water catchments are poorly understood and not widely appreciated by decision makers. CEPF will support grantees to collect this information but will require such preparatory work to be clearly linked to subsequent conservation action.

Undertaking joint research can also be a basis for working with other CSOs, local stakeholders and government agencies, to strengthen or develop collaborative relationships that can form the basis for joint action for freshwater conservation at KBAs. At transboundary sites, it will often be advantageous to plan this across national borders, and to work closely with national and international decision-making bodies.

Investment Priority 2.2 Advance protection, restoration and improved management of important sites for freshwater biodiversity, with the participation of local stakeholders

CSOs supported by CEPF grants are most likely to be able to take direct conservation action at specific sites, where working with management agencies or local stakeholders can change behavior, reduce the impact of specific threats, or exploit opportunities for enhancing management, protection or restoration. These threats may be the result of proposed infrastructure, which may cause direct habitat loss and/or indirect impacts through changed flow regimes and land use patterns. Threats may be more insidious and cumulative, for example through pollution, deforestation in the catchment, or the impacts of climate change.

Many projects can follow a proactive agenda to achieve better outcomes for priority sites, rather than being reactive to external threats. KBAs may not be directly threatened but may be degraded or in need of additional measures to achieve their potential both for conservation of biodiversity and provision of ecosystem services. There may be opportunities to progress towards additional formal or informal protected areas, including CCAs or OECMs, or to strengthen freshwater elements of management plans within existing protected areas. There may also be priority sites with important populations of threatened species that could be further recovered by targeted measures. Although the most appropriate level for direct action by CSOs is at clearly defined sites, the connectivity of freshwater systems makes it highly likely that some action may also be needed at the catchment or river basin level to address these threats or opportunities, especially from upstream infrastructure or issues relating to improving water quality (e.g., from nutrient pollution, agriculture and forestry run-off, sewage disposal, etc.), water volume and flow and disturbance to habitat (e.g., straightening and deepening of river beds, drainage of wetlands, gravel mining, etc.). This will involve influencing those actors from government and/or the private sector who are involved with or have the authority to influence these issues.

Strategic Direction 3. Promote traditional land-use practices that maintain biodiversity in priority corridors

Main focus, justification and impact

Mediterranean biodiversity has evolved with human land-use practices over several thousand years, to the extent that many of the most threatened terrestrial species in the hotspot are dependent on habitats that are maintained through continuing human interventions for agriculture, seasonal grazing or harvesting of wild products (see Chapter 4). The species and habitats that depend on these anthropogenic systems can become threatened when an established management system is abandoned and vegetation succession occurs, when traditional sustainable practices change and cause degradation and erosion (e.g., over-grazing), or when intensive agricultural and land use practices, including the use of irrigation and agrochemicals, replace traditional practices and eliminate the opportunity for wild biodiversity to co-exist with agricultural systems (see Chapter 9). Under this strategic direction, CEPF will support CSOs to work with local community land managers and local enterprises to pioneer innovative ways to sustain certain elements of traditional land-use practices that are important for threatened biodiversity. CEPF will focus its work primarily upon ecosystems where pastoral management with extensive grazing of livestock has been a key component of land management. CEPF will support work in and around KBAs that contain such systems, as well as work in wider corridors, where supporting such management can be demonstrated to protect the integrity of one or more KBAs.

CEPF will focus on landscapes where grazing is a key component of the management of the landscapes and in maintaining biodiversity but also an important economic and cultural activity for communities (Investment Priority 3.1). Supporting more sustainable

grazing management practices is expected not only to conserve threatened biodiversity but also to preserve natural capital necessary for local livelihoods, through reduction of erosion or preservation of water quality and availability. Improved grazing management also contributes to the protection and sustainability of Mediterranean forests, which are threatened by poor regeneration due to overgrazing, while well managed grazing can help reduce the incidence of wildfires: a growing threat related to climate change (Chapters 9 and 10). The most important landscapes threatened by inappropriate grazing regimes in the Mediterranean Basin are in the uplands, justifying the selection of the priority corridors in Table 13.3. Preserving mountain landscapes is essential for enabling plants and associated species to adapt and migrate along altitudinal gradients, tracking cooler habitats, as lower ones become inhospitable due to climate change (Chapter 10).

Based on lessons learned during phase II, CEPF wants to actively promote the role of traditional land users, by trialing solutions and innovations, sharing experiences and promoting lessons and successes widely to government, local communities and donor agencies. It is intended that these projects will share more in common, and that practitioners can form a community of interest in sharing their experiences and in encouraging their further replication and upscaling, in particular in the context of OECMs (Investment Priority 3.2).

Geographic focus

Traditional management practices in cultural landscapes survive throughout the region, often in places affected by emigration, marginalization and rural poverty. In many rural areas, evolution of agriculture practices has led to an homogenization of habitats and species, which would be difficult to reverse in the short term. To maximize the value of projects in demonstrating innovative approaches to land management that can benefit biodiversity conservation, CEPF will prioritize projects that have potential for making a difference to globally threatened biodiversity, and, therefore, favor projects centered on Key Biodiversity Areas and with impacts on threatened species. Projects may extend beyond the strict boundaries of KBAs, to follow a landscape approach and take into account ecological connectivity.

Six corridors were selected where elements of traditional management systems are still the main land use and that have a high percentage of land covered by KBAs, allowing for the maintenance of ecological connectivity at the landscape scale (Table 13.3, Figure 13.1). Within these corridors, CEPF will prioritize KBAs above 500 meters of elevation.

Within each of these corridors, applicants can propose sites where the conservation of biodiversity within or in the vicinity of one or more KBAs depends on the continuation of traditional management practices, where these practices are changing but where an intervention to support the maintenance of traditional practices appears feasible. The focus of this strategic direction is primarily on upland grazing landscapes where the traditional practice has been to manage the landscape through extensive grazing that safeguards biodiversity values while providing secure and sustainable income and employment.

Table 13.3 Corridors prioritized for CEPF support under Strategic Direction 3 and number of KBAs prioritized

Corridor	Eligible Countries	Corridor area (km^2)	# of KBAs
Orontes Valley and Levantine Mountains	Türkiye*, Syria*, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine	38,433	27
The Atlas Mountains	Morocco	106,691	19
The Rif Mountains	Morocco	15,488	3

The Dorsal and Tellian Atlas	Tunisia, Algeria	82,633	34
Eastern Adriatic	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo*	23,402	7
Southwest Balkans	Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro	37,808	35

**No investment currently foreseen in these countries for this Strategic direction*

Feasibility is indicated by factors, including:

- There is security of access to the land/resource (or it can be secured without competition with a major alternative land use that has powerful economic and political backing), and the individuals or groups that directly use the resource are also the people who make decisions about its management.
- Customary knowledge and skills for resource management still exist within the community.
- There is an opportunity to engage a private sector actor (e.g., a buyer or processor of produce) who can support the marketing of products, or to form local associations or enterprises that can facilitate this.
- There is an opportunity to cluster a series of grants, for example around a large KBA or a series of KBAs, allowing collaboration and experience sharing within similar social and environmental contexts.
- The presence of a longer-term source of support that could sustain activities into the long term (e.g., a donor funded or government scheme, or an institution such as a protected area management agency with a budget); recognizing that participatory community processes can be slow, and that a single grant may only be able to initiate the process.

Some of the landscapes where this strategic direction is relevant are in protected areas where traditional agro-silvi-pastoral practices still exist (i.e., IUCN categories V and VI). There may be opportunities for CSOs to work with protected area managers and local resource users to establish collaborative management systems that promote traditional resource management as a way to maintain biodiversity while contributing to local livelihoods.

Investment Priority 3.1 Support traditional resource managers to follow land management practices that maintain biodiversity in mountain landscapes

The core of this strategic direction is working with traditional resource managers to enable them to enhance their livelihoods through maintaining biodiversity-rich traditional practices. Across the Mediterranean Basin, this most frequently involves actions involving the grazing of livestock, which has maintained a range of open habitats for centuries. As well as maintaining open areas, these practices also have a strong interrelationship with the regeneration and good management of Mediterranean forests and are important in mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change.

This investment priority will prioritize these practices, as it will enable a focus for lessons to be learned, supportive policies to be promoted, and communities of practice to be developed. These practices are changing, often for socio-economic reasons, but the dynamics are different in different areas. Both the intensification and abandonment of livestock grazing can be damaging. The intention is to ensure livestock levels and management practices are compatible with maintenance of the valuable habitats, in and around KBAs. While grazing management is often key in these landscapes, it also goes along with other agricultural practices that are beneficial to the diversity of habitats and species, due to the mosaic features of the area. They are also key for the diversification of incomes. Therefore, projects may include activities to sustain and improve these agricultural practices. The key will be to enable resource users to increase their income, through improvements to processing and marketing of products, including through certification and labelling, as well as exploring opportunities such as payment for environmental services or access to government support. Use of innovative techniques

and tools will be promoted, as long as they support the sustainability of traditional land-use practices.

CEPF is particularly keen to support projects that have features that can be scaled up and potentially replicated elsewhere, so that lessons from this work can be used to expand the fund's reach and impact.

Investment Priority 3.2 Document and promote traditional land-use practices and Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures among local and national governments

While resource users and managers will be the main beneficiaries of projects under Investment Priority 3.1, it is also important to promote the importance of and rationale for traditional, biodiversity-friendly practices among a wider group of actors, and to promote longer term initiatives to sustain, expand and replicate successful projects. CEPF can only ever fund projects in a small proportion of these very large corridors, and yet greater ambition is needed if such areas are to contribute meaningfully to biodiversity goals, and to support rural populations living and working there. Investment Priority 3.2 will promote learning and understanding of these conservation and rural development linkages at local, national and international scales. The longer-term objective is to encourage the establishment of support programs and networks to maintain these cultural landscapes. Locally and immediately, CEPF will encourage successful projects to seek to formalize achievements through progressing towards an appropriate designation for the land. While this could be a formal protected area designation (IUCN Categories V or VI), it would more usually be some form of OECM, such as CCAs or the traditional local systems that exist in some parts of the hotspot.

Applicants will be encouraged to ensure that they have an adequate range of expertise to implement these complex projects. Options may include joint applications from conservation and rural development organizations or hiring of technical experts from appropriate disciplines.

Strategic Direction 4. Strengthen the engagement of civil society to support conservation of threatened plants and plant communities

Main focus, justification and impact

The Mediterranean Basin Hotspot is defined on the basis of an exceptionally high number of endemic plants, coupled with a loss of more than 70 percent of the original vegetation. While plants will benefit along with other species from CEPF investments under Strategic Directions 1, 2 and 3, the level of threat and the lack of attention to the specific conservation needs of plants to date justify a separate strategic direction focused on this group. In addition to supporting direct action for the conservation of plants, projects under this strategic direction will also contribute to strengthening the botanical knowledge and skills of scientists, conservationists, and land managers within the region. The aim is to increase the proportion of plants that have been formally assessed against the IUCN Red List criteria.

The limited range and very specific habitat requirements of some threatened plants means that their conservation can be tackled effectively by local CSOs working on the ground with limited resources, often in partnership with protected areas managers or local landowners.

Over the last decade, an important effort by the botanical community (funded, in part, by CEPF), under the auspices of the IUCN Mediterranean Plant Specialist Group, led to the identification of a set of Important Plant Areas (IPAs) later recognized as KBAs for

some of them, and improved understanding of threats facing plants. Nevertheless, the number of plants in the Mediterranean Basin is so huge that only around 15 percent of them have been assessed against the IUCN Red List criteria, making it very likely that there are many threatened plant species that have not yet been recognized at the global or regional level.

Thematic focus

Given the above, this strategic direction focuses on sites comprising priority plant species, defined as:

- Plant species in threat categories Critically Endangered (CR), Endangered (EN) or Vulnerable (VU) on the IUCN Global Red List
- Plant species that have not yet been assessed on the Global Red List, but that are included on regional red lists or would qualify for global CR, EN or VU status according to the IUCN Red List criteria.
- Site-restricted endemics (SRE), which include:
    - Taxa occurring in only one site (and nowhere else in the world) or
    - Extent of occurrence less than 100 km^2 or
    - Area of occupancy less than 10 km^2.

Priority will be given to projects that:

- Demonstrate that they are focused on one or several priority species or are addressing a priority need for the conservation of plants (e.g., surveys of under-surveyed plants or plant communities (such as non-vascular plants), or population assessments of potentially threatened species).
- Demonstrate that they will lead directly to action for the conservation of priority plant species as defined above.
- Include, where possible, a significant component on capacity building for plant conservation, for either the project implementers or their local partners (e.g., community resource users or protected areas managers).
- Complement other projects (funded by CEPF or not) working at site/landscape level, therefore creating synergies between plant conservation community and other conservation actors.
- Address the conservation of sites where there is a demonstrable need for funding and opportunity for success.

Investment Priority 4.1 Build the capacity of the botanical community to increase knowledge and skills and engage in applied conservation of threatened plants

One of the challenges in continuing the process of identifying important KBAs for plants, assessing the conservation status of plants, and taking action for their conservation is the limited number of people in the region with the necessary botanical skills. CEPF will support projects that have a strong element of developing practical botanical skills, including survey, *in situ* or *ex situ* conservation, provided that it enables the protection, reintroduction or reinforcement of populations of threatened species. This will involve working with traditional educational institutions (botanical gardens, universities, research institutes, etc.), as well as working to improve the skills of other groups with the potential to contribute to plant conservation, including protected area managers, members of voluntary societies and land managers. CEPF is particularly keen to increase capacity in countries where major gaps have been identified as regards the size and capacity of the botanical community, such as Morocco, Libya, Algeria and Cabo Verde. CEPF is also keen to support work on lesser-known plant groups, including non-vascular plants, which are currently less studied and protected.

Investment Priority 4.2 Secure better implementation of plant conservation in the management of protected areas

Populations of threatened plants are often located within protected areas but are still threatened because management (or lack thereof) does not address their specific

conservation needs. This is, in part, due to a lack of knowledge, skills and experience among practitioners.

Investment Priority 4.3 Take innovative actions for conservation of threatened plants, working with landowners and land users

Many threatened plant populations survive in managed landscapes, outside of protected areas, and are potentially threatened by changes in land use practices. This investment priority will seek to protect these populations and create the enabling conditions for population recovery where needed. This may entail creating a formal or informal protected area or coming to an agreement with landowners or land users relating to specific management actions to improve the conservation status of plants. This may also entail working with national or local government agencies and public institutions, private landowners, and community groups.

Investment Priority 4.4 Improve conservation efforts for wild crop relatives, medicinal plants and other wild plants of economic and cultural value

The Mediterranean Basin has a long cultural history of using a wide range of native plant species for culinary and medicinal uses, and, in some cases, creating domestic varieties of the wild species. These include a wide range of herbs, vegetables, fruits and trees. The Mediterranean Basin is also very rich in Crop Wild Relatives (CWR) native to the region. Overall, European and Mediterranean flora revealed that approximately 80 percent of the species in the region are CWR and other species of socio-economic importance (Kell *et al.* 2008) While many species are still widespread and continue to form a part of traditional Mediterranean diets, others have become very scarce and are threatened by over-collection, as well as habitat loss and the other threats facing all plant species.

The conservation of CWR is important, particularly as a reservoir of genes that can help improve the resistance of cultivated plants to climate change and other human-induced impacts. Several large organizations, including the Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO), agronomy institutes and research centres, and TRAFFIC, have worked for a long time on this topic, particularly on assessment, genetic research and promotion. Nevertheless, the topic is rarely embraced by local CSOs, and conservation projects with local communities remain few. The conservation of CWR can, thus, also form compelling stories, which can raise awareness of wider land-use change and conservation issues. This investment priority will seek to achieve concrete conservation action at the local level and raise awareness of the cultural history and conservation needs of CWR, framed within the context of wider environmental issues. CEPF will only support conservation action for priority plants species that fulfil the criteria listed above.

Strategic Direction 5. Facilitate the development of a robust and resilient community of conservation Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

Main focus, justification and impact

Environmental civil society is increasingly active in the Mediterranean Basin, and CEPF believes in CSOs as strong and credible stakeholders to reach sustainable biodiversity conservation impacts. Nevertheless, most CSOs are facing organizational challenges that they often struggle to deal with.

This includes a need to focus on organizational resilience and sustainability, achieved through, among other things, a well-defined strategy and clear mission, sound operational policies and procedures, and good governance. Developing a strong foundation for securing core funding, maintaining a stable and engaged team, ensuring a transparent and effective organizational structure, and strengthening leadership skills

are also priorities. Additionally, there is an opportunity to capitalize on learnings and enhance the sharing of values across teams to promote a unified culture. In that sense, focusing on the organizational development of these CSOs is a key element for a stronger civil society, to ensure that CSOs are able to support conservation action in an efficient and sustainable manner.

The efficiency and resilience of civil society also goes beyond the strengths of individual organizations. Ecological science demonstrates that ecosystems are more resilient, adaptable and productive when they are diverse, with a full range of ecological functions and relationships in place. A parallel can be drawn with conservation communities, and CEPF believes that collective action and strengthening of networks and partnerships is key to make civil society stronger and better able to tackle conservation challenges.

These partnership efforts also need, sometimes, to go beyond civil society. In the region it is particularly important that conservation organizations demonstrate to authorities that their role is important for achieving their targets and fulfilling their international commitments (Chapter 8). This calls for collective action.

This strategic direction will support specific actions along the two paths of organizational development for individual CSOs, and collective action and partnerships. These two approaches have much in common and serve each other. Working together and learning through peer experience contributes to individual organizations' development; and stronger organizations can contribute more to the collective efforts.

Investment Priority 5.1 Provide support to targeted conservation CSOs engaged in a process of organizational development

As each CSO has its own trajectory, specifically linked to its history, the socio-political context in which it evolves and its members, it is necessary that the support for CSOs be specific to the needs and motivations of their members. Thus, the notion of organizational change requires a commitment on the part of the CSO, which will be an essential prerequisite for any support from CEPF. Some organizations may already have clear ideas on how to improve their organizational capacities, while others may be still on their way, and need support to identify issues and areas for improvement. Change should not be forced by CEPF, and the timing of support should be well thought out by the organization. The preferred contractual arrangement with CEPF will, therefore, be a grant by invitation, usually to a current or former CEPF grantee organization. This commitment will be translated into an initial organizational diagnosis and action plan, where this has not already been done by the CSO.

This preliminary stage will make it possible to specify the needs of the targeted organization and to have a point of comparison at the start of the support. CEPF, the RIT or an external expert/entity may play the role of facilitator. The action plan will be a guide, but additional activities may be introduced as the work progresses.

For the implementation of the action plan, it would be preferable for expert support to be provided over the medium term rather than very short periods, to gain greater trust and understanding of the realities of the CSO and to monitor the implementation of lessons learned or new measures. This support may be provided either in parallel with a field project linked to another strategic direction, or independently. The CSOs may, subject to agreement with CEPF, involve organizational experts to assist them with this work.

This investment priority will enable CSOs to receive individual support for specific organizational change needs identified in advance. The pillars targeted will be (i) strategic, (ii) organizational, (iii) technical and (iv) cultural (i.e., what makes the identity of the CSO, what motivates the team).

Investment Priority 5.2 Enhance the collective strength and ability of conservation CSOs at national and regional levels

This investment priority will focus on enhancing collective efforts among CSOs to promote both mutual learning and network dynamics aimed at conserving biodiversity. It could be an opportunity for CSOs to raise a common Mediterranean conservation agenda, or to advance as a group towards shared objectives. This might for example enable collaborative working to advance CBD and NBSAP objectives, or the enhancement of national KBA preogrammes. There are also existing networks of CSOs in the Mediterranean Basin that aim to promote exchanges of expertise among their members, or awhich focus on issues or groups of threatened species, and which CEPF may support in order to upscale or strengthen actions undertaken via the other strategic directions.

Strategic Direction 6. Provide strategic leadership and effective coordination of conservation investment through a regional implementation team

Main focus, justification and impact

In every hotspot approved for investment, CEPF works with a regional implementation team or RIT to convert the plans in the ecosystem profile into a cohesive portfolio of grants that exceeds in impact the sum of its parts. The RIT will consist of one or more CSOs active in conservation in the hotspot. The RIT will be selected by the CEPF Donor Council based on approved terms of reference. The team will operate in a transparent and open manner, consistent with CEPF's mission and all provisions of the CEPF Operational Manual. Organizations that are members of the RIT will not be eligible to apply for other CEPF grants within the same hotspot. Applications for grants from formal affiliates of those organizations that have an independent board of directors will be accepted, subject to additional external review.

The role of the RIT will remain central to the operation of the grants programme and will continue to seek to collate and integrate experiences from site-level work in order to promote replication and scaling up and achieve policy impacts (see Chapter 12) and sustainability (see Chapter 15).

Investment Priority 6.1 Support a broad constituency of civil society groups working across institutional and political boundaries towards achieving the shared conservation goals described in the ecosystem profile

The RIT will provide strategic leadership and local knowledge to build a broad constituency of civil society groups working across institutional and political boundaries toward achieving the conservation goals described in the ecosystem profile. It will implement a number of functions, as set out in the terms of reference, including.

- Act as an extension service to assist civil society groups in designing, implementing, and replicating successful conservation activities.
- Review all grant applications and manage external reviews with technical experts and advisory committees.
- Award small grants up to an agreed threshold amount and decide jointly with the CEPF Secretariat on all other applications.
- Lead the monitoring and evaluation of individual projects using standard tools, site visits, and meetings with grantees, and assist the CEPF Secretariat in portfolio-level monitoring and evaluation.
- Build the institutional capacity of grantees to ensure efficient and effective project implementation.
- Widely communicate CEPF objectives, opportunities to apply for grants, lessons learned, and results.

The RIT will directly support strategic development of the grant portfolio and contribute, in its own right, to the achievement of critical conservation results that yield portfolio-wide benefits. Such activities may include facilitating learning exchanges among

grantees and other stakeholders, identifying leveraging opportunities at the grant or portfolio level, or collaborating with other donors to align support to CSOs and their conservation projects.

In line with the overall CEPF investment niche, capacity building and organizational development will be at the core of the RIT's role, as per Strategic Direction 5. The RIT will be responsible for ensuring that partners have the institutional and individual capacity needed to design and implement conservation projects that contribute to the overall investment strategy. The RIT will also have a role in communicating about CEPF's focus on organizational development, publicizing the opportunity, and supporting CEPF to identify organizations to receive organizational development grants. Experience has shown that capacity building efforts are essential to ensuring good projects that are integrated into a wider hotspot strategy and a common conservation vision. The added emphasis on organizational development aims to increase the resilience and sustainability of CEPF's investment on all levels.

14. RESULTS FRAMEWORK

The result framework uses primarily CEPF Global Indicators (GI) to set targets for the investment in the hotspot. Additional Portfolio Indicators (PI) are introduced to set target and monitor impacts specific impacts that are not covered by the global indicators.

The objective for the portfolio is to support 140 projects (50 Large Grants, 90 Small Grants) over a 6-year investment period., for at least 110 individual civil society organizations, 90% of which being local organizations.

PILLAR 1: BIODIVERSITY

Our goal: Improve the status of globally significant biodiversity in critical ecosystems within hotspots.

		SD1	SD2	SD3	SD4	**Overall Objective**	***Means of verification***
GI-B1	Number of globally threatened species benefiting from conservation action.					**60 species**	*Grantee reports*
GI-B2	Number of hectares of Key Biodiversity Areas with improved management.	50,000 ha	100,000 ha	450,000 ha		**600,000 ha**	*Grantee reports*
GI-B3	Number of hectares of protected areas created and/or expanded.	22,000 ha	2,000 ha	3,000 ha	3,000 ha	**30,000 ha**	*Grantee reports, Official documents*
GI-B4	Number of hectares of production landscapes with strengthened management of biodiversity.	70,000 ha		900,000 ha		**970,000 ha**	*Grantee reports*
GI-B5	Number of protected areas with improved management.	12	8	5		**25**	*METTs (or alike tool)*
GI-B6	Number of hectares of terrestrial forest, terrestrial non-forest,	200 ha	500 ha	15,000 ha		**15,700 ha**	*Grantee reports*

	freshwater and coastal marine areas brought under restoration.						
PI-B1	Number of emerging threats to sites avoided through CSO engagement.	5	5		2	**12**	*Grantee reports*
PI-B2	Number of hectares in the process of being protected (with files submitted to authorities)	30,000 ha				**30,000 ha**	*Grantee reports, Preparatory Reports submitted to authorities*
PI-B3	Number of sites with improved knowledge of biodiversity.	15	10	10	15	**50**	*Grantee reports*
PI-B4	Number of ha recognized under the OECM.					**20,000 ha**	*Grantee reports*
PI-B5	Number of protected areas with better implementation of plant conservation in management.					**15**	*Grantee reports*

PILLAR 2: CIVIL SOCIETY

Our goal: Strengthen the capacity of civil society to be effective as environmental stewards and advocates for the conservation of globally significant biodiversity.

GI-CS1	Number of CEPF grantees with improved institutional capacity.	**80 (80% of local CEPF grantees)**	*CSTT (or alike monitoring tool)*
GI-CS2	Number of CEPF grantees with improved understanding of and commitment to gender issues.	**90 (90% of local CEPF grantees)**	*GTT*
GI-CS3	Number of networks and partnerships that have been created and/or strengthened.	**15 networks (among which at least 5 transboundary / regional)**	*Grantee reports*

PI-CS1	Number of organizations engaged in an organizational development process	**40**	*CEPF report*
PI-CS2	Number of CEPF grantees that have made significant progress towards their own organizational development goals at the end of the investment phase	**20**	*Specific survey at mid-term and at the end of investment phase*
PI-CS3	Number of countries with enhanced collective CSO capacities.	**10**	*Collective civil society assessment*

PILLAR 3: HUMAN WELL-BEING

Our goal: Improve the well-being of people living in and dependent on critical ecosystems within hotspots.

		SD1	SD2	SD3	SD4	**Overall Objective**	Means of verification
GI-HW1	Number of people (male/female) receiving structured training					**2,500 (at least 50% female)**	*Grantee reports*
GI-HW2	Number of people (male/female) receiving non-cash benefits other than structured training	40,000	10,000	100,000		**150,000 (at least 50% female)**	*Grantee reports*
GI-HW3	Number of people (male/female) receiving cash benefits (e.g. increased income from employment, increased income from livelihood activities, etc.)	500		1500		**2,000 (at least 50% female)**	*Grantee reports*
GI-HW4	Number of projects promoting nature-based solutions to combat climate change.					**50**	*CEPF Secretariat analysis of portfolio*
PI-HW1	Number of communities adopting/sustaining			30		**30**	*Grantee reports*

	traditional land management benefitting biodiversity						
PI-HW2	Number of young scientists (male/female) trained on biodiversity conservation (MSc/PhD)	5	10	5	30	**50 (at least 50% female)**	*Grantee reports*

PILLAR 4: ENABLING CONDITIONS FOR CONSERVATION

Our goal: Establish the conditions needed for the conservation of globally significant biodiversity.

		SD1	SD2	SD3	SD4	**Overall Objective**	*Means of verification*
GI-EC1	Number of laws, regulations, and policies with conservation provisions that have been enacted or amended		2	2		**4**	*Grantee reports, Official documents*
GI-EC2	Number of companies that adopt biodiversity-friendly practices	2	3	3	2	**10**	*Grantee reports*
PI-EC1	Number of municipalities engaged in preserving biodiversity, demonstrated by municipal decrees, creation of municipal reserves etc.	5	2	10	10	**27**	*Grantee reports, Official documents*

15. SUSTAINABILITY

This profile incorporates sustainability as a principle into its strategic directions in order to ensure the long-term survival of viable ecosystems which the life in the Mediterranean Basin depends on. The new investment strategy will need to place more emphasis on strengthening civil society, encourage multi-stakeholder approaches, and build synergies between the CEPF strategy and other funding sources in the region. We intend to build the capacity of institutions, support projects which achieve long term conservation solutions, and encourage replication of the work across a wider area, based on lessons learned from our investments.

In the next phase CEPF aims to take a more systematic approach to organizational development to help improve the long-term effectiveness for civil society. We will engage with selected grantees who wish to be involved in understanding their main organizational objectives and assist them in meeting them. The strengthening of civil society will continue to be a focus across all strategic directions. We hope that CSOs will ultimately be able to influence those political decisions which have a major impact on natural resources. Mainstreaming biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services into all levels of decision making and development planning is a key approach that will strengthen institutional and financial sustainability of CEPF's investment in the region. While our focus is on civil society, we hope that through our work the capacity of government institutions can also be assisted. We are particularly keen to demonstrate the achievements and lessons of our work to local and national government so that they can consider how to scale up and replicate successes, via the strengthening of policy support, and through catalyzing the availability of additional government or donor funds.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