

Call for Papers : **Environmentally Harmful Subsidies in the Mediterranean: Balancing Sustainability, Economy, and Equity**

ABOUT PLAN BLEU

In 1976, the Mediterranean-rim countries and the European Community adopted the Barcelona Convention to protect marine environment and its coastal areas. The necessity to collectively address development and environment in order to build a sustainable future for the Mediterranean is fully integrated by signatory countries. [Plan Bleu](#) is one the Regional Activity Centres of the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), put in place by France since 1977. Its program of work is approved every two years by the Contracting parties to the Barcelona Convention. Plan Bleu produces studies and scenarios for the future in order to raise awareness of Mediterranean stakeholders and decision-makers regarding environment and sustainable development issues in the region.

The Call for Papers described below has been launched by Plan Bleu with the aim to comprehensively examine the various types of harmful subsidies, their associated environmental impacts, and their implications for sustainable development in the Mediterranean. By conducting a rigorous analysis and disseminating evidence-based policy recommendations, Plan Bleu seeks to raise awareness, galvanize action among policymakers, stakeholders, and the global community to address the root causes of environmental harmful subsidies. The Call for Papers fits seamlessly and can be integrated within a global context focused on sustainability and international cooperation. By aligning its efforts with initiatives that include the Mediterranean Sustainable Development Strategy (SMDD), OECD guidelines and European Union policies, Plan Bleu showcases a strong commitment to coherence and convergence of environmental actions across different policy layers. Moreover, this Call finds resonance with influential global organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF, which recognize the crucial importance of reforming harmful subsidies to promote sustainable and balanced development.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental harmful subsidies have emerged as a pressing global concern, with far-reaching consequences for our planet's ecological balance and sustainability. Subsidies, intended as financial incentives provided by governments to support various economic activities, often carry unintended environmental consequences. In many cases, these subsidies encourage practices that exacerbate resource depletion, pollution, and the overall degradation of ecosystems. As we stand at a critical juncture in the fight against climate change and biodiversity loss, it becomes imperative to address the detrimental impact of harmful subsidies on our environment.

Environmentally harmful subsidies include direct and indirect subsidies, on-budget and off-budget measures, as well as differential treatment. Namely they include transfers from

public budgets (national, sub-national, local) to private entities and other public entities. They include tax expenditures in many different forms (tax rate reductions, discounts and exemptions). They also include differentiation on tariffs (fees, charges) for environmental services (e.g. waste, water, local mobility). The priority of analysis is not its juridical form, but its economic nature and its environmental impact.

The issue of environmental harmful subsidies holds particular significance for Mediterranean countries, given the unique ecological characteristics and socio-economic dynamics of the region. The Mediterranean basin is renowned for its rich biodiversity, delicate marine ecosystems, and critical role in climate regulation. However, this vibrant region faces a range of environmental challenges, and harmful subsidies exacerbate these issues, posing significant threats to both the environment and the well-being of its populations.

- **Marine Biodiversity and Overfishing:** The Mediterranean Sea stands as a remarkable biodiversity hotspot, embracing a diverse tapestry of marine species, many of which hold endemic and vulnerable status. Yet, the vitality of this marine realm faces a perilous threat - overfishing, driven in part by certain types of fishing subsidies. These subsidies, while intended to bolster the fishing industry, often inadvertently fuel unsustainable fishing practices that disrupt the delicate equilibrium of marine ecosystems. Coastal communities, whose livelihoods are intricately woven with the fabric of sustainable fishing, bear the brunt of these consequences. Sustainable fishing practices are essential not only for the health of marine biodiversity but also for ensuring the long-term viability of the fishing industry itself. To safeguard both marine ecosystems and the socio-economic well-being of coastal communities, it's imperative that we reevaluate and reform these harmful subsidies.
- **Climate Change Vulnerability:** Mediterranean countries are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, facing rising temperatures, reduced rainfall, and increased frequency of extreme weather events. Energy subsidies that encourage fossil fuel consumption further contribute to greenhouse gas emissions, exacerbating climate change effects and compounding the region's vulnerability.
- **Water Resources and Agriculture:** Water scarcity is a significant concern in the Mediterranean, and agricultural subsidies that promote inefficient water usage can strain already limited resources. Unsustainable agricultural practices, encouraged by harmful subsidies, contribute to soil degradation, erosion, and pollution, leading to reduced agricultural productivity and threatening food security. Right now, the UN is advocating for a transformation of the worldwide agricultural system, proposing a redirection of \$540 billion from farm subsidies to address both public health and the climate emergency. This call comes in light of a [recent study](#) that highlights the outsized greenhouse gas emissions from 20 prominent livestock and dairy corporations, backed by influential global banks and investors, surpassing those of major nations like Germany, Britain, and France.
- **Tourism and Coastal Development:** The Mediterranean region attracts millions of tourists annually, and tourism-related subsidies may inadvertently contribute to unsustainable coastal development, habitat destruction, and increased waste

generation. Such practices put immense pressure on fragile coastal ecosystems and compromise the natural beauty that draws tourists to the region. At present, it is apparent that the true cost of tourism's externalities often remains unaccounted for. For instance, the rapid pace of coastal development, fueled in part by such subsidies, leads to habitat destruction and alters the very essence of the Mediterranean's picturesque coastal areas. The unchecked expansion of hotels, resorts, and other infrastructure disrupts the delicate balance between human activities and the environment, fragmenting habitats and threatening biodiversity. Moreover, waste generation emerges as another concerning consequence of tourism-related subsidies. Subsidies often fail to address the comprehensive waste management systems required to handle a surge. The result is often overwhelmed waste disposal sites, increased litter, and plastic pollution that taint the very natural beauty that initially attracted visitors.

- **Economic Resilience and Social Equity:** The reliance on harmful subsidies in some Mediterranean countries can hinder economic diversification and innovation, perpetuating dependence on environmentally harmful industries. Moreover, the negative environmental consequences of these subsidies often disproportionately affect vulnerable communities, exacerbating social inequalities and hindering the achievement of sustainable development goals.
- More generally, **tax spending can become an environmental harmful subsidy** when it provides incentives favoring activities like fossil fuels, unsustainable agriculture, car-dependent transportation, deforestation, and wasteful water use. Such subsidies can exacerbate pollution, climate change, habitat loss, and resource depletion, hindering environmental sustainability goals. Realigning tax incentives towards eco-friendly practices is vital for reducing these negative impacts.

Considering the interconnectedness of Mediterranean ecosystems and the shared responsibility of all countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, collaborative efforts to address environmental harmful subsidies are essential. A unified approach towards phasing out or reforming these subsidies can bolster regional environmental resilience, promote sustainable economic growth, and protect the natural heritage that defines the Mediterranean region.

THEME OF THE CALL FOR PAPERS

This Call for Papers is open to all researchers working on Subsidies and related socioeconomic and environmental issues with a focus on the Mediterranean region. Successful papers should bring a real value added, be evidence-based and be offering operational and realistic policy recommendations for the region. Paper proposals may relate to the concepts and questions listed below. The list is indicative and not exhaustive :

1. **Fishing Subsidies and Marine Conservation:** What is the impact of fishing subsidies on marine ecosystems and the sustainable management of marine resources in the Mediterranean ? It's crucial to emphasize that the issue is not solely about subsidising fishing; rather, it's about the type of subsidies provided. Presently,

many fishing subsidies disproportionately favor the deployment of destructive fishing methods. It's a nuanced distinction with far-reaching consequences. Are there successful examples of Mediterranean countries that have reformed fishing subsidies to promote responsible fishing practices and marine conservation ?

2. **Tourism Subsidies and Sustainable Tourism:** At present, it is apparent that the true cost of tourism's externalities often remains unaccounted for. The Mediterranean region attracts millions of tourists annually, and tourism-related subsidies may inadvertently contribute to unsustainable coastal development, habitat destruction, and increased waste generation. What are these types of subsidies across Mediterranean countries and their precise impact ? Exploring the impact of tourism-related subsidies, how can sustainable tourism practices protect natural landscapes, support local communities, and minimize environmental footprints ?
3. **Unraveling Harmful Subsidies in Protected Marine and Terrestrial Areas :** Within the realm of harmful subsidies, a compelling yet understudied domain emerges—the intricate relationship between environmentally damaging subsidies and the sanctuaries of biodiversity known as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Protected Areas (PAs). How does the presence of harmful subsidies threaten to compromise their very essence? How do subsidies impact the management of MPAs and PAs? What are the latent effects on species preservation, ecosystem resilience, and sustainable resource use? Do subsidies inadvertently undermine the objectives of conservation and exacerbate threats to these protected zones? By shedding light on the less-explored dynamics within MPAs and PAs, such paper can aim to instigate a robust dialogue, encouraging policymakers, environmentalists, and stakeholders to reevaluate the intricate relationship between subsidies and the delicate tapestry of protected natural spaces. In this priority theme, papers can either take a general approach to address the overarching issue or delve into specific case studies. These case studies might focus on dissecting the dynamics of a particular Protected Area or explore how subsidies intersect within a country's Protected Areas. Alternatively, the scope could narrow down to analyzing a specific type of subsidy within Protected Areas.
4. **Energy Subsidies and Climate Change:** Addressing the link between energy subsidies and climate change, how do fossil fuel subsidies hinder the transition to renewable energy sources in Mediterranean countries and contribute to greenhouse gas emissions? International organizations such as the OECD, IEA and IMF have launched inventories and studies on fossil fuel subsidies, biodiversity harmful subsidies, and environmentally harmful subsidies in general. Some countries have also developed national inventories and catalogues that deserve to be replicated in Mediterranean Countries. There are noteworthy examples of Mediterranean countries like Morocco, strategically realigning their subsidy strategies, showcasing the transformative potential of subsidy reform. Beyond the conventional focus on fossil fuels, the paper can also shed light on the broader spectrum of energy subsidies, encompassing both fossil and renewable sources. While fossil fuel subsidies hinder the transition to renewables and intensify greenhouse gas emissions, the adverse consequences of renewable energy subsidies on biodiversity,

fisheries, and landscapes also warrant evaluation. A fresh perspective on reforming energy subsidies in a given country (ex. successful example of Morocco) may also be explored if it offers novel insights.

5. **Agricultural Subsidies, Sustainable Farming and linkages with marine and coastal environment:** how harmful subsidies influence farming practices, land use and what repercussions this may have on marine and coastal environments ? What case studies of countries' coastal areas that have implemented sustainable agricultural policies, fostering biodiversity conservation and promoting eco-friendly farming techniques ?
6. **Water Subsidies, Ecosystem Dynamics, and Sustainable Resource Management :** Within the context of harmful subsidies, water subsidies stand as a pivotal thread weaving through diverse sectors such as agriculture, tourism, and industry. What are the implications of water subsidies for both terrestrial and marine ecosystems? How do water subsidies, encompassing aspects like desalination, irrigation, and aquaculture, play a role in steering land use and consumption patterns? How do they perpetuate inefficient and unsustainable practices? However, the paper can go beyond challenges. What examples of countries have effectively reformed water subsidies, championing sustainable practices that align with ecosystem preservation? The experiences of countries like Israel, exemplified by its successful transition to self-financing water management, can serve as examples.
7. **Transportation Subsidies and Green Mobility:** Analyzing the impact of transportation subsidies on urban planning and mobility, what policies that prioritize public transportation, cycling, and walking, reducing the carbon footprint of transportation systems ? But while emissions reduction is pivotal, it's only the tip of the iceberg. This paper can also scrutinize transportation subsidies through a multifaceted lens, uncovering a spectrum of adverse effects that extend well beyond carbon footprints. Beyond emissions, such subsidies may influence urban landscapes through soil urbanization, exert pressures on biodiversity, mar landscapes, and extend their reach into both air and water pollutant emissions, often disregarded in mainstream discourse.
8. **Social Justice and Equity Considerations:** what are the disproportionate effects of harmful subsidies on vulnerable populations, such as marginalized communities (youth, women, migrants) ? What policies that prioritize social justice and ensure an inclusive and fair transition to sustainable economies?
9. **International Cooperation and Policy Framework:** This paper can emphasize the need for international collaboration to address harmful subsidies effectively. It can scrutinize the contributions of entities such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCDE), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in catalyzing subsidy reform. With a Mediterranean focus, the paper can explore the participation of the region within pivotal platforms (Barcelona Convention). Central to this discourse is the proposal of robust global policy recommendations and mechanisms for fostering synchronized endeavors among nations. The paper can advocate for the coordination of subsidy phase-out or reform, embracing a collective ethos that spans boundaries and aligns

diverse interests. As an example, recently, the IMF, OECD, World Bank, and WTO [launched the Joint Subsidy Platform \(JSP\)](#) to increase transparency surrounding subsidy usage. The platform aims to provide accessible information on subsidies' nature, size, and economic impact, facilitating discussions on their proper application and design. The paper could focus on how such tool can contribute to promoting dialogue among governments in the Mediterranean and establish better subsidy policies based on comprehensive data and analysis.

10. **Measuring Progress and Accountability:** Focusing on monitoring and evaluation, what key indicators to track progress in phasing out or reforming harmful subsidies? How to ensure accountability and transparency in implementing policy changes? Such paper can outline key indicators to track progress in phasing out or reforming harmful subsidies. Drawing from several global experiences and expertise, this paper can delve into a diverse array of indicators, encapsulating the spectrum of environmental, economic, and social dimensions influenced by subsidy reform. Central to this exploration will be the work of institutions like the OECD, whose insights and frameworks provide valuable compass points for assessing the effectiveness of subsidy reform, country examples of green budgeting such as France's pioneering efforts in the context of the Budget for 2023, the contributions of the European Court of Auditors, reports from WWF Mediterranean etc.
11. **Pathways to Sustainable Development:** how eliminating or reforming harmful subsidies can contribute to achieving sustainable development goals, including biodiversity conservation, climate action, and poverty alleviation?
12. **Bringing fresh perspectives** to the challenge of phasing out environmental harmful subsidies in the Mediterranean: What is the potential of **Green Digital Subsidies**? What role can **Eco-Tax Shifting** play? Can promoting **Circular Economy Subsidies** bring sustainability gains and how? What benefits of **Community-Led Subsidy Reform**? What role can **Nature-Based Solutions Subsidies** play?

ELIGIBILITY

The Call for Papers is open to all experts and researchers working in Mediterranean countries that are Contracting Parties to the Mediterranean Action Plan of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP/MAP). This includes : Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Slovenia, Spain, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Türkiye. Candidates must demonstrate their legal capacity to sign contracts and issue invoices according to the legislation of their country. Researchers from the Southern Mediterranean, including women and PhD graduates, are encouraged to participate.

SUBMISSION PROCESS

Interested researchers are invited to submit by October 9th 2023, the following 2 documents:

1. **A detailed concept note for the research paper** (5 to 7 pages) including:

A **cover page (1 page)** with:

- a. The summary of the paper stating:
 - the title and objective of the paper
 - the knowledge gap and the value added of the paper
 - methodology/approach
 - expected results and regional policy implications
- b. Presentation of the author(s) and the topic of the research as follows:
 - Name of the author(s)
 - Their affiliation(s)
 - Contact details (including email)
 - Address, city and country
 - Which of the stated topics of the research they will be addressing

The remaining pages of the concept note should include the following :

- a. Statement of research stating the problem addressed, brief review of the literature, the knowledge gaps the paper will address and a preliminary outline.
- b. Research methodology stating the research question, the hypothesis to be tested, the methodology (e.g case studies, empirical evidence, etc.) and the rationale for using the selected methodology.
- c. Expected results and policy implications : how will the outputs and results of the research translate into policy recommendations. Recommendations must be linked to the analysis, be specific and operational.

2. The CVs of the author(s) including list of publications

EVALUATION AND SELECTION

The best proposals will be selected by Plan Bleu based on objective criteria including: quality of the presentation of the research objectives, the policy relevance of the topic as well as the inclusion of an indicative list of references.

Other criteria: Final selection may be subject to adjustments to take into account regional, subjects and gender balances. Previously published papers or those already accepted for publication will not be accepted. All submitted drafts will go through a plagiarism-checking process. No single author may submit more than two papers, whether independently or jointly with others. Draft papers should be submitted in English. Young researchers are also encouraged to apply. Submissions that are not consistent with the above guidelines will be excluded.

EXPECTED OUTPUTS FROM SELECTED PAPERS

- Author(s) of the selected concept notes will be asked to submit a first draft (maximum 15-20 pages) of the research paper by December 10th.

- Selected authors will be invited to present their Papers to the Plan Bleu Conference on “Harmful Subsidies in the Mediterranean”, taking place end 2023 / early 2024 (Marseille). Authors will get feedback and inputs from other experts and researchers, to be used to finalize the Paper. Papers will be adjusted in light of the debates held at the Conference and/or consolidated based on the feedback received.
- Following the Plan Bleu Conference, authors will be expected to submit a revised and final version of their Paper. The final draft shall be submitted by mid-April 2023. The final version of the paper will be peer-reviewed and if successful, will be published in the Plan Bleu research papers series and Edited Volume.

REMUNERATION

- Each Paper will be awarded with €2,500 gross. A first payment (50%) will be provided after successful selection of the draft. A second (and final) payment (50%) will be provided after the final draft is submitted, provided that the peer review is positive and that the provided Paper meets the established quality standards.
- Flights and accommodation to the Plan Bleu conference will be covered for selected authors.

SUMMARY AND TIMELINE FOR THE CALL FOR PAPERS

- October 9th : Deadline for Submission of Draft Concept Notes
- mid-October: Review and Selection Process and Announcement of selected Concept Notes
- October/November : Travel arrangements for authors of selected paper (one author per paper) - Including visas (when applicable)
- December 10th: Submission of first draft of selected papers
- end 2023 / early 2024 : Presentation at the Plan Bleu conference
- April 15th : Submission of the final version of papers
- mid-April : Completion of the peer-review process and decision of publication
- May-June : Publication in Plan Bleu Edited Volume

CONTACT DETAILS

To submit your concept note by October 9th 2023 and for any inquiries related to this call, please contact Constantin Tsakas, Program Officer, Socio-Economic Analysis and Blue Economy ctsakas@planbleu.org and planbleu@planbleu.org with the subject line: Plan Bleu Call for Papers.