



UNEP – IMELS cooperation in South East Europe	
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**INNOVATIVE
SOLUTIONS
TO POLLUTION
IN SOUTH EAST
& SOUTHERN
EUROPE**



TERMS OF REFERENCE
SOUTH EAST EUROPEAN PLATFORM TO BEAT POLLUTION –
SEEPP

DECEMBER 2019



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1. Rationale and background

Pollution, health and environmental risks

Pollution is a universal challenge that does not respect national boundaries and contributes to the death of millions of people every year. It has been estimated by the World Health Organization (WHO) that 23% of all deaths worldwide were due to environmental risks and that approximately 7 million premature deaths take place each year because of air pollution.

South East Europe, and specifically the Western Balkans, represents one of the most polluted regions of Europe, facing several environmental challenges such as air, freshwater and soil pollution, waste and chemical discharges. South East European countries share high-quality environmental and natural resources and particularly the Western Balkans are considered as the last and only “wild” region of Europe, containing high levels of biodiversity, intact rivers and pristine forests. However, this region is also facing serious challenges related to environmental pollution. For example, cities of the Western Balkans rank as worst in Europe for air pollution, where in cities like Sarajevo or Skopje, the number of days exceeding WHO guidelines for pollutants are many times over 200 per year. Most wastewater is discharged directly into rivers and sea, without any prior treatment, and the collected municipal solid waste is disposed to designated waste sites that have no sanitary measures, where about 30% of all waste produces ends up on illegal dump sites. Illegal dump sites are many times near the rivers and in protected areas. Despite substantial technological and managerial improvements in the production and consumption pattern and significant international support, people and environment of the region still face serious threats.

Pollution governance framework

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹, will shape national development plans over the next 15 years. From ending

¹SDGs target addressing pollution: 3.9: By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination; 12.4: By 2020, achieve the environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle, in accordance with agreed international frameworks, and significantly reduce their release to air, water and soil in order to minimize



poverty and hunger to responding to climate change and sustaining natural resources. By tackling pollution through existing agreements and other international initiative, important synergies and multiple benefits can be obtained, including making progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals targets.

In this context, Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and UN resolutions provide a solid governance framework for targeted and time-bound actions, while some also include compliance related actions, monitoring and reporting. Several Multilateral Environmental Agreements² address different types of pollution. The Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution has 40 years of experience in reducing air pollution on a broad regional basis, while the implementation of the Paris Agreement represents a major step forward in tackling air pollution. At the same time, the Minamata Convention is one of numerous MEAs targeting chemicals and waste.

The Third Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA 3), held in Nairobi in December 2017 under the overarching theme “Towards a pollution-free planet” has delivered several urgent commitments to end pollution of air, land, waterways, seas and oceans. Building on this, UNEP developed a Pollution Implementation Plan to accelerate the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration and resolutions addressing pollution at the global level. The Implementation Plan, presented in early 2019, represents a useful tool that looks at Member States, as well as development partners, UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, local authorities and communities. The plan supports the action of ministries, policy makers and relevant stakeholders towards a pollution-free planet.

EU Environmental acquis

In the coming years, countries of South East Europe and specifically countries from the Western Balkans, will have the chance to move forward on their respective European paths, by addressing vital reforms and complete political, economic and social transformation. Among other, the countries of the region need to comply with the EU Environmental acquis, i.e. open negotiations on Chapter 27 on Environment and Climate Change, which has not materialized yet for some countries.

their adverse impacts on human health and the environment; 14.1: By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.

² Key multilateral agreements are the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Convention, Minamata Convention and the Montreal Protocol, the UNECE Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution.



According to the latest European Commission reports on Chapter 27, all countries of the sub-region have achieved some level of preparation in this area, while significant gaps still need to be addressed³. Most importantly, most of the countries should intensify efforts regarding the implementation and enforcement of existing policy frameworks, including closing non-compliant landfills, investing in waste collection, separation and recycling, reinforcing air quality monitoring and advancing on river basin management. The European Union is already assisting in addressing air quality, land and water pollution. In this sense, and to stimulate a sustainable economic transition, the EU adopted in 2015 the Circular Economy Package and additional policy, financial and legislative measures targeting the neighbouring countries.

Belgrade Ministerial Conference on Pollution

In this context, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Government of Serbia, with the support from the Italian Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea (IMELS), convened a regional Ministerial Conference on “Innovative Solutions to Pollution in South East and Southern Europe” that took place on 4-5 December 2018 in Belgrade, Serbia. Sixteen countries from South East and Southern Europe⁴ and more than 300 relevant regional stakeholders gathered in Belgrade to discuss how to jointly address the increasing levels of pollution that the region is facing and the application of innovative solutions to tackle the adverse effects of pollutants.

The Ministerial Conference resulted into the adoption of a Joint Ministerial Vision on Innovative Solutions to Pollution⁵ in which countries highlighted the importance of regional cooperation to address pollution-related challenges and made several commitments and recommendations. The document faithfully follows the logic of circular economy launched by the EU in 2015 and is fully in line with the UNEA 3 declaration “Towards a pollution-free planet”, fostering regional partnerships which is key in the fight against pollution. The Belgrade Conference outcome document recognized the issues presented in the foregoing section as follows:

³ As of April 2019, Montenegro is the only country in the Western Balkans that opened the negotiations on Chapter 27.

⁴ Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Turkey

⁵ https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/27112/20181202_FINAL_Joint%20Regional%20Vision%20on%20Innovative%20Solutions%20to%20Pollution_%20-%20Copy.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y



“16. Building on the on-going consultations on an Implementation Plan of the Ministerial Declaration “Towards a Pollution-Free Planet”, we request the United Nations Environment Programme to:

- a) Support Western Balkan countries’ capacities in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sustainable Development Goals and assist in meeting obligations under respective multilateral environmental agreements.*
- b) Establish a United Nations Environment Programme sub-regional presence for facilitating exchange of information and creation of partnerships to increase synergies of ongoing projects and furthermore implement national policies in the fields of environmental protection and sustainable development.*
- d) Increase support to Western Balkans countries and facilitate access to innovative partnerships to enhance efforts to implement policies, legislations and programmes.”*

Moreover, UNEP has been tasked to provide additional support to Western Balkan countries in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs and obligations deriving from relevant Multilateral Environmental Agreements dealing with pollution, including the recently developed UNEA Pollution Implementation Plan. The Belgrade Conference outcome results, together with the concept of establishing an ad-hoc Sub-Regional Platform to Beat Pollution in South East Europe, were presented in the framework of a side event at the Fourth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly on 12 March 2019 in Nairobi, Kenya.

2. The South East European Platform to Beat Pollution

Even though multiple interventions and initiatives to support environmental protection and sustainable development in South East Europe already exist, there does not appear to be an impact oriented, regionally-owned multi-stakeholder process dealing with the increasing levels of pollution that provides a timely overview of the implemented activities, ongoing projects and opportunities. As a result, key stakeholders (Governments, Donors, International Organizations and Civil Society Organizations) are only partially aware of all the different initiatives and projects focusing on pollution reduction and control. Therefore, to make more efficient use of resources and funds available, the coordination of ongoing activities should be improved.



Following the adoption of the Belgrade Ministerial Conference outcome document, the Joint Ministerial Vision on Innovative Solutions to Pollution and considering the favourable political momentum around the topic in South East Europe, UNEP is ready to assist countries of the region in their fight against pollution through support to the creation of a dedicated Sub-Regional Platform. The concept of a **South East European Platform to Beat Pollution (SEEPP)** was presented at the Fourth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly and was well received by participating countries and donors.

The aim of this institutional platform is to catalyse action and facilitate regional coordination. The SEEPP is a regionally owned and led framework and its aim is to support countries in their coordinated actions against pollution by accelerating and upscaling initiatives addressing pollution. This tool provides countries from South East Europe, members of the international community and donors with a strategic platform to promote the implementation of pollution-related Multilateral Environmental Agreements and EU environmental acquis in the region.

2.1 Geographical scope

The South East European Platform to Beat Pollution is open to all interested Governments and relevant stakeholders from the region. Relevant Ministries will designate one Operational Focal Point (and alternate) responsible for following the establishment and activities of the SEEPP. The Operational Focal Point will be an active contributor of the Task Force. The SEEPP will be open to observers, which will include countries from EU and southern Europe, interested donors and international and regional organizations. Civil Society Organizations and their networks will be invited to participate in the Platform meetings in their capacity as observers.

2.2 Instigators of the SEEPP

As previously mentioned, the participating countries of the Belgrade Ministerial Conference on “Innovative Solutions to Pollution in South East and Southern Europe” identified the need for an enhanced cooperation in the field of pollution management in South East Europe. The main instigator of the SEEPP is the United Nations Environment Programme, which has been joined by the Italian Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea (IMELS) in its capacity as contributor to the initiative. The mandate and core activities of the SEEPP will be further consulted and developed, also through this Terms of Reference (to be considered as a “living



document”), with all participating Governments of the SEEPP and target regional stakeholders. The Terms of Reference will be finalized and adopted by all participating stakeholders.

2.3 Phased approach

The set-up and operations of the SEEPP will follow a phased approach. The first phase will focus firmly on setting-up the Platform structure, through a consultative and open process which will include all participating governments, stakeholders and donors. In the first year (Phase 1) and based on the relevant information and identified needs, SEEPP will establish its governance structures (Task force and its Presidency, Secretariat), mobilise more environmental stakeholders and develop workplans and strategies. Needs assessments and feasibility studies, which will prioritise interventions and support activities, will be undertaken and coordinated by UNEP in its capacity of Secretariat of the SEEPP.

Accelerating and expanding the operations of the SEEPP in the future phases will depend on successful resource mobilizations with the donors’ community. This Terms of Reference largely focuses on the Phase 1, with the expectation that subsequent Phases will be funded.

2.4 Focus on country-defined priorities and impact

The SEEPP will complement ongoing regional initiatives by its focus on a few priorities that will be identified by countries.

Key criteria for selection of these priorities include:

- The pollution has a proven and severe impact on public health;
- The pollution is an issue in all countries of the region, with relevant transboundary impacts;
- The pollution has a substantial negative impact on national/regional economies;
- A proposed action is likely to have a fast and wide impact from which the whole region will benefit.



2.5 Added value

Given the multitude of other interventions and activities implemented at the regional level in the fields of environmental protection and sustainable development, it is of paramount importance that the SEEPP clearly defines how it intends to provide added value to the South East European region in effectively combating and controlling pollution. Therefore, the first main activity that the SEEPP will initiate is the development of an assessment and analysis of past, present and planned interventions and initiatives in the priority areas presented below (Partnership support, Institutional strengthening and capacity building, Project hub and Information sharing).

In this light, the SEEPP represents a unique mechanism in the South East European panorama, building on partnerships and alliances and focusing on the added value of coordination, collaboration and synergies among past and present initiatives. The action of the SEEPP will be based on regional involvement and ownership.

The set-up of the SEEPP will follow a multi-stakeholder approach, supporting regional dialogue and cooperation, and will ensure a strong participation of Civil Society Organizations and networks.

2.6 General objectives and principles

The South East European Platform to Beat Pollution is a participatory, flexible and transparent process, focusing on the following three general objectives:

- Facilitate the creation of innovative multi-stakeholder partnerships dealing with pollution;
- Foster sub-regional cooperation and project/programme development in the fields of environmental protection and sustainable development, with a specific focus on pollution prevention, reduction and monitoring;
- Support exchange of information on initiatives and best practices and catalyse action.

2.7 Priority areas

Participating countries and relevant stakeholders will need to agree on the priority areas of the SEEPP during the first Regional Consultation Meeting that should take place in June 2019 in Vienna, Austria. Already identified and proposed priority areas can be summarised as:

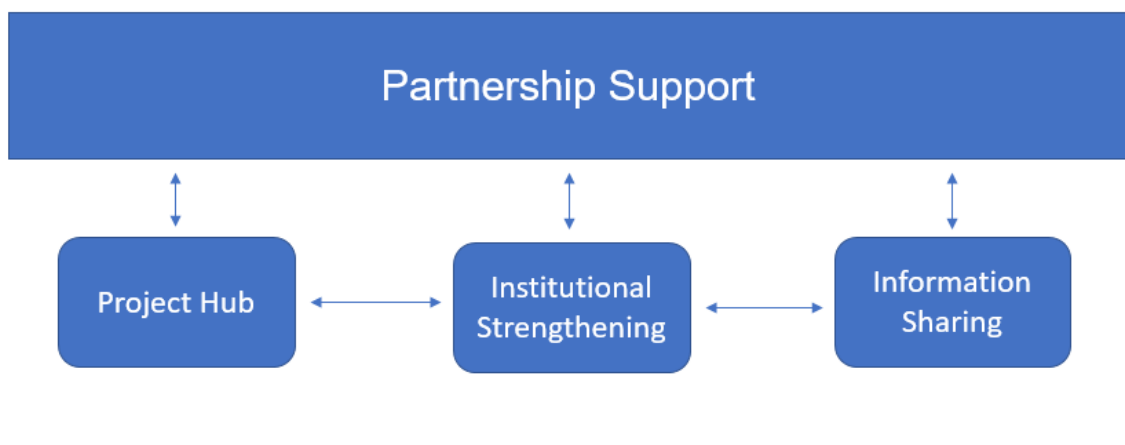


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- ➔ **Partnership support** (as the overarching priority area): Through an inclusive approach building synergies and working with a wide array of relevant stakeholders to support high-impact solutions in the fight against pollution.
- ➔ **Institutional strengthening** and capacity building: Supporting countries in meeting their obligations and in implementing international conventions, frameworks and approaches to prevent and control pollution through capacity building.
- ➔ **Project Hub**: Providing the donor community with a list of “quick start” project concepts and ideas, considering the identified countries’ needs and priorities in the field of pollution management and control.
- ➔ **Information Sharing**: While pollution is a global issue, the priorities and capacities to act on it vary by region and country. To provide better enabling conditions, the SEEPP will provide information sharing functions by identifying potential synergies at the regional level. Countries share good practices, technologies and innovative solutions to avoid pollution and reduce the impact of pollution when it happens.
- ➔ **Inclusive regional engagement** (as cross cutting theme).

Inclusive regional engagement



Inclusive regional engagement



2.8 Core activities

Phase 1 core activities of the SEEPP can be divided into the following categories listed below:

➔ Promote information sharing

- Collect and share information about on-going interventions and initiatives in support of the identified priority areas;
- Creating an enabling environment to foster collaboration among on-going initiatives;
- Upon request and through the Project hub, supporting donors to develop joint proposals and projects.

➔ Generating and sharing knowledge

- Fostering communication on experience and best practices of on-going projects;
- Facilitating knowledge-sharing, best practices, policies and strategies;
- Assess demands and needs of SEE countries and facilitate response from the donor community.

➔ Communication

- Development of a dedicated website, brochures, newsletters and social media;
- Facilitate the presentation of on-going interventions in the region related to the pollution management.

2.9 Civil Society

Civil Society Organisations represented by the nine Major Groups⁶, are partners for Governments in achieving the objectives of the SEEPP.

From each South East European country, organisations, preferably representing the nine Major Groups, are invited to participate in the SEEPP Taskforce and thematic clusters, with the right to contribute to the discussions, including by oral and written interventions.

⁶ Women, Children and Youth, Indigenous Peoples, Non-Governmental Organizations, Local Authorities, Workers and Trade Unions, Business and Industry, Scientific and Technological Community, Farmers



To participate in the Task force, organisations need to be legally registered in a South East European Country as a non-governmental, not for profit entity, or be registered as a non-governmental, not for profit entity elsewhere but with membership in at least one South East European country. Furthermore, the organisations need to work in the field of environment and/or sustainable development and are expected to subscribe to the objectives of the SEEPP and to engaging constructively with the platform.

In engaging Civil Society, the SEEPP will respect the principle of self-organisation of non-governmental organisations. Governments may however reject the participation of certain organisations, if they do not fulfil the criteria mentioned above.

Civil Society is invited to work closely with the Secretariat in identifying the most suitable organisations from South Eastern Europe to participate in the SEEPP.

2.10 Private Sector

The Private Sector is represented in the Task Force and thematic clusters by the Business and Industry Major Group. On a case by case basis, individual companies may be invited to meetings of the Platform to benefit from their expertise and to engage them in specific initiatives.

2.11 Donors community

The South East European Platform will be set-up with a medium/long-term time horizon in mind, however its longevity will depend on donor willingness and commitment to provide additional resources.

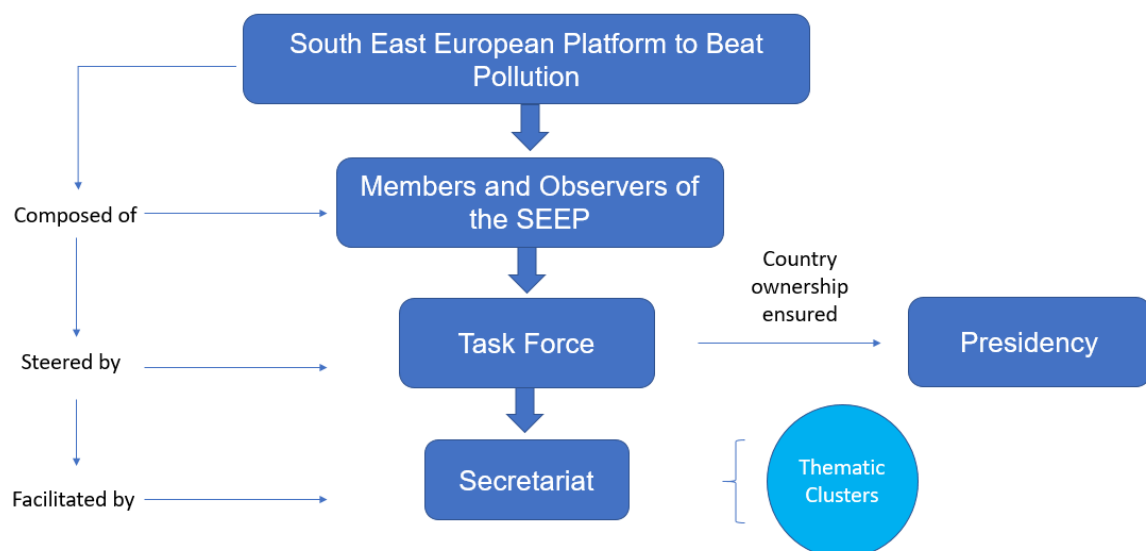
Following the successful Belgrade Ministerial Conference on “Innovative Solutions to Pollution in South East and Southern Europe” financial resources for the design, set-up and first year of its operation (Phase 1) have been secured by the Italian Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea (IMELS). UNEP is providing some additional in-kind co-financing.

The initiative is looking at additional donors and partners, that could support the 2 and 3 years of activities (Phase 2). Target donors will be invited to take part in the Task Force meetings as observer and at the Ministerial conferences.

3. Governance and structure

The driving body of the South East European Platform to Beat Pollution is the Task Force which is composed by representatives of South East European countries, donors and relevant stakeholders. The Presidency of the SEEPP ensures enhanced country ownership of the process, while operations and activities of the Platform will be facilitated by the Secretariat, provided by UNEP Vienna Programme Office.

Governance of the SEEPP is proposed to be composed of the following elements:



3.1 Task Force

The activities of the SEEPP will be coordinated by a dedicated Task Force composed of representatives designated by the Ministries of Environment of South East European countries, and representatives from Civil Society Organisations from the region (see above). Civil Society Organisations are selected based on transparent criteria, such as their expertise in the field of environment and/or sustainable development and their previous participation in comparable bodies. Representatives of donor countries, European Commission, International



Organizations and other Civil Society Organisations will have an observer status. Observers are invited to all meetings, are provided with all relevant information and may intervene (in written or oral form).

The Task Force is chaired by a SEE country on a rotating basis (every 12 months).

The Task Force operates in a spirit of partnership, coherent and complementary efforts by participating countries, donors, International Organizations and Civil Society Organizations. The Task Force meets at least once a year to discuss major development of the SEEPP at the regional level. In between, if necessary, conference calls can be set-up for facilitating the implementation of activities. SEEPP meetings are arranged and facilitated by the Secretariat (UNEP), which develops agenda and minutes of the meetings.

The Task Force takes decisions on the implementation of activities of the Platform and is responsible for the following aspects:

- i The overall steering and coordination of the SEEPP;
- ii Approval and implementation of Platform's priority areas;
- iii Development of Platform's programme of work and activities;
- iv Development, establishment and coordination of thematic clusters;
- v Decisions on the involvement of stakeholders and observers;
- vi Determine the eligibility of the proposed project ideas, in consultation with the Interim Secretariat.

3.2 Presidency

A crucial element for the successful deployment of the SEEPP is the country ownership of the initiative. The SEEPP remains a strongly country-driven exercise in its implementation, which contributes to the transparency and flexibility of the action.

To ensure the acceptance and ownership of the Platform, a "lead country role" is established. This provides political support and leadership to the platform's activities. The Presidency rotates among the SEEPP countries every 12 months. The lead country oversees the Task Force activities and ensures, in collaboration with the Secretariat, that the activities of the Platform are implemented efficiently and in line with the programme of work. The main purpose of this concept is to give the target countries opportunities to exercise international and regional leadership, to actively contribute to the regional cooperation, and to develop institutional capacity and experience in the field of pollution management.



The Presidency hosts the Ministerial conferences.

The Ministerial conferences will be organized annually or when the activities performed will require a higher political support emerging from the Platform.

3.3 Thematic clusters

Thematic clusters should be established under the leadership of the Task Force. These clusters may focus on the different pollution dimensions (air, water, land/soil, marine and coastal, chemicals and waste) and discuss the implementation of the SEEPP activities following a sectoral approach. Thematic clusters should also be responsible for the development of the list of project concept ideas to be included in the Hub component. A stocktaking exercise on the past and ongoing addressing pollution in South East Europe should be performed under the guidance of the thematic clusters.

The composition and core activities of the thematic clusters should follow a balanced representation, including representatives from target countries and civil society and other relevant stakeholders. Results provided by the cluster shall be presented at every Task Force meeting.

3.4 Interim Secretariat

UNEP – Vienna Programme Office provides the Interim Secretariat of the SEEPP. The Secretariat coordinates the implementation of the core activities and makes sure that these are coherent with the countries' priorities and needs. UNEP will rely on its significant in-house knowledge in the field of pollution management and control, through the support of the its internal Sub-Programmes and serviced Multilateral Environmental Agreements.

The Secretariat will provide the following functions:

- i Supporting the platform's day-to-day operation and coordination of activities;
- ii Liaising with participating Governments, stakeholders, donors and observers on platform related matters;
- iii Facilitating the organization of regional consultation meetings (2 per year);
- iv Resource mobilization, donor coordination;
- v Publicizing and disseminating platforms reports to a wider audience;
- vi Establishing of platform web-site and media channels;

vii Outreach and capacity building activities.

The Secretariat is in regular contact with the Task Force, the Presidency, active donors and observers. It ensures the implementation of the decision and facilitates communication between stakeholders and provides information on the progress and development within the Platforms' activities. The SEEPP meetings are organised and prepared by the Secretariat in cooperation with the leading country (Presidency). The Secretariat also maintains the SEEPP web-site and media channels.

3.5 Language

The working language of the SEEPP is English. Task Force meetings as well as the ministerial conferences will be held in English. All official documents and other materials, including the web-site, should be produced in this language.

4. Implementation Plan

The following implementation plan briefly describes the proposed Phase 1 for the calendar years 2019-2020. Phase 1 of the initiative will run for 12 months, starting in March 2019 and running to February 2020. The table below provides an overview of the implementation plan and timeline for the given period. UNEP, in cooperation with target countries and the Task Force, is responsible for the activities listed below.

Activity	2019									2020		
	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February
<p>Phase 1 – The set-up of the SEEPP Phase 1 will run for 12 months and represent the inception period of the SEEPP. The core funding for this first phase has been secured by the Italian Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea.</p>												

