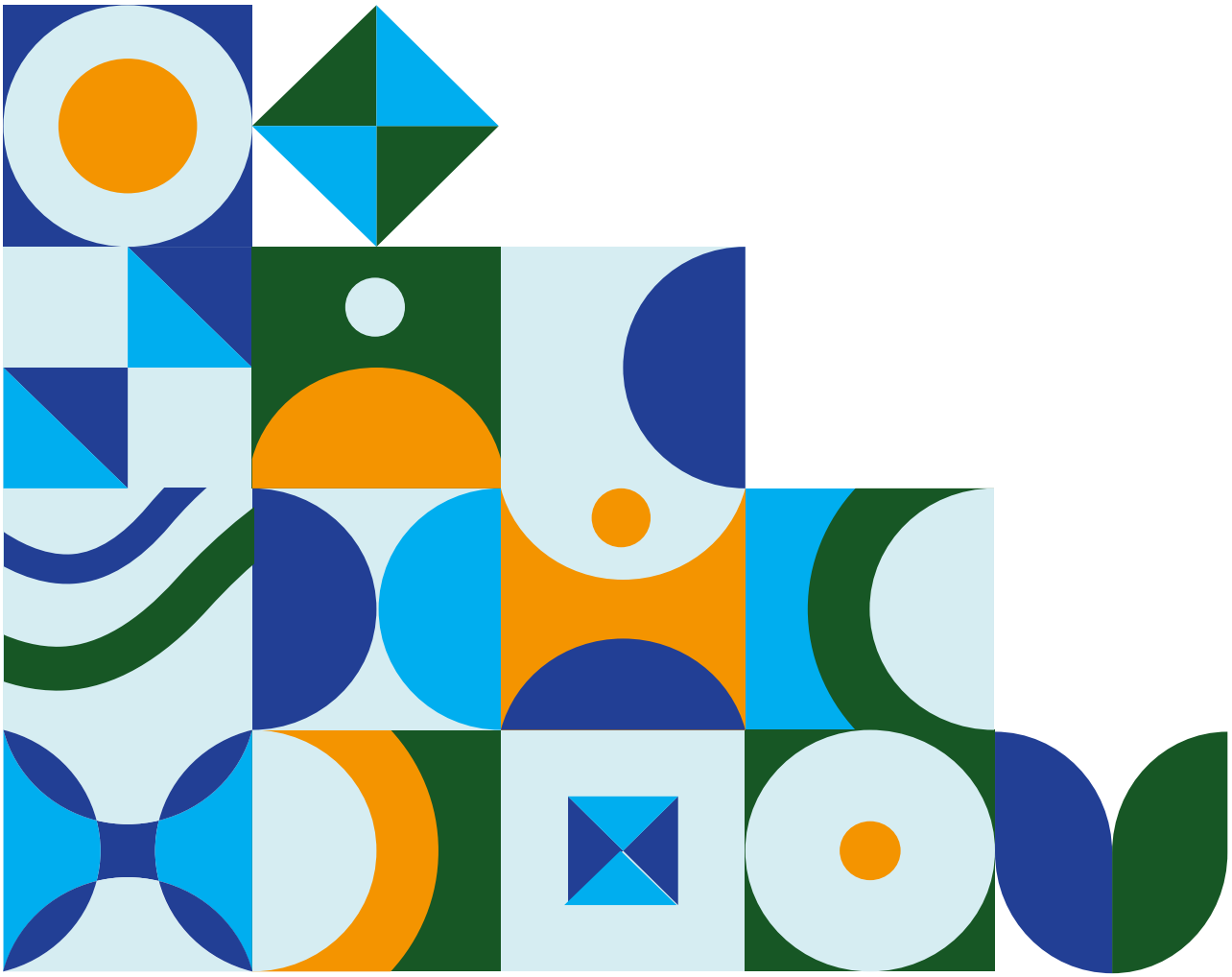
MEDITERRANEAN STRATEGY
FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT 2026-2035
FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE

ISTANBUL ENVIRONMENT FRIENDLY CITY AWARD (IEFCA)

FACTSHEET



UN environment programme

Mediterranean Action Plan
Barcelona Convention

ISTANBUL ENVIRONMENT FRIENDLY CITY AWARD (IEFCA)

FACTSHEET

The overall aim of the initiative is to encourage and upscale the role of Mediterranean coastal municipalities in planning and managing Mediterranean cities as pillars of a shared vision for a sustainable development of the urban coastal areas in the region and key actors for implementation, while promoting exchange of best practices at regional level.

BACKGROUND

Population densities in Mediterranean coastal areas have continued to increase at unsustainable rates over the last decade. Over 1965- 2015, urban pressures increased in 75% of Mediterranean countries and this trend is expected to continue, prefiguring a worsening of current problems: excessive land consumption; biodiversity loss; more rapid degradation of architectural heritage; aquifer exhaustion and pollution; inefficient non separative waste management and the cumulative effect of all these factors on the environment and human health.

Mediterranean cities are insufficiently resilient in terms of coping with natural and human-made risks and hazards, while their potential as drivers of innovative and sustainable social and economic change is insufficiently recognized.

The Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, at their 19th Meeting (COP19, Athens, Greece, in 2016) established the Istanbul Environment Friendly City Award.

The Award, conferred through an open call to applicants, assesses and recognizes the achievements of Mediterranean coastal cities that demonstrate efforts and improvements in the urban environment and the quality of life, while promoting sustainable development.

The Istanbul Award is financially sponsored by the Government of Türkiye, with a voluntary contribution. The Awards ceremonies are organized, since 2017, in the framework of the COP meetings.



THE FLAGSHIP IN NUMBERS

Key figures

- While by 2050 the urban population in the Mediterranean coastal regions is expected to nearly double, the Mediterranean is warming 20% faster than other regions
- The total Mediterranean regional population is projected to reach between 630 and 690 million inhabitants by 2050, a 20-30% increase from current levels
- By 2050, at least half of this population will reside in coastal areas
- Since 2016, 5 editions of the IEFCA have been implemented
- The Award of the 6th edition will be celebrated at COP25 in late 2027
- Winners of the 5 past editions are:
  - 2017 - 1st edition: Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, Türkiye
  - 2019 - 2nd edition: Ashdod, Israel
  - 2021 - 3rd edition: Malaga, Spain
  - 2023 - 4th edition: Genoa, Italy
  - 2025 - 5th edition: Almeria, Spain



MSSD Objective 4

Plan and manage sustainable and resilient Mediterranean cities

MSSD Target 11

By 2030, all Mediterranean Countries have substantially reduced waste generation through prevention, recycling and reuse, particularly by ensuring that at least 60% of municipal solid waste is sustainably recycled, composted or managed, including separate collection and material recovery, including biowaste, with emphasis on packaging waste and on the most environmentally damaging single use plastic (SUP) products as a priority

Target 12

By 2035, Contracting Parties/ Mediterranean Countries have adopted regulatory and policy frameworks with health-based standards for air quality having regard to the World Health Organization (WHO) Air Quality Guidelines

MSSD Dashboard indicator 20

Waste generated and treated by type of waste and

treatment type

MSSD Core indicator 9

Air quality: a) concentration of PM2.5; b) carbon monoxide emission

Contributing to SDG 11

Sustainable Cities and communities

ISTANBUL ENVIRONMENT FRIENDLY CITY AWARD (IEFCA)

OBJECTIVES

The Istanbul Environment Friendly City Award aims to provide recognition to the efforts of local authorities to improve the environment and the quality of life and promote sustainable development in Mediterranean coastal towns and cities.

It also aims to encourage Mediterranean coastal towns and cities to move towards a more environment-friendly future and to enable them to serve as model-cities and inspire sustainable urban development in the region.

The Mediterranean local authorities are invited to apply to the competition by submitted their application via a dedicated platform managed by INFO/RAC **IEFCA (website)** | **INFO-RAC** and with the support of a specifically helpdesk and informative workshops.

The Application shall demonstrate concrete steps taken and progress achieved to protect the environment, improve the quality of life, and promote sustainable planning and management. Applications should equally emphasize partnerships with civil society, the scientific community and the private sector, including actions aimed at promoting urban sustainability.

There is no size or population reference, i.e. both small towns or metropolitan cities are eligible to apply.

LEADERSHIP AND PARTNERSHIP

The initiative is co-managed by UNEP/MAP - Barcelona Convention Secretariat and MedCities.

The Republic of Türkiye support the initiative through a voluntary contribution.

MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS

Since 2017, the Istanbul Environment Friendly City Award (IEFCA) has successfully awarded 5 Mediterranean cities during the COP meetings, namely **Izmir (Türkiye), Ashdod (Israel), Málaga (Spain), Genoa (Italy) and Almeria (Spain).**

These Municipalities have demonstrated good achievements on urban sustainability, within key components such as climate change, ecosystem protection, wise/efficient/sustainable-use of resources, resilient infrastructure, local transport, pollution and waste, water, energy efficiency, green buildings, etc.

In the course of its implementation the IEFCA has contributed to raise multi-level awareness on the importance and the issues linked to sustainable urban areas, and to identify best practices to encourage efforts in addressing the pressures to the marine and coastal environment associated with urban development.

CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD

Climate change adaptation and mitigation is heavily dependent on urban action and Mediterranean cities have a key role to play as 'local sentinels' and key implementers to support decarbonization efforts therefore contributing to the development and implementation of climate change measures.

Accordingly, the way forward should plan to upscale the Istanbul Environment Friendly City Award by:

- Supporting municipalities integrating climate change mitigation and adaptation measures into local policies, strategies and planning, and in line with national plans therefore reinforcing multi-level governance
- Promoting public/private investments to support zero net decarbonization paths
- Streamlining IEFCA implementation by ensuring the exchange of awarded best practices and knowledge at local and regional level
- Supporting cities in accelerating their digital transformation as key asset towards decarbonization
- Supporting capacity building and trainings of local authorities
- Promoting Citizen and stakeholders' engagement
- Creating synergies with the EU Mission Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities, Mediterranean Covenant of Mayors and other relevant initiatives and regional networks.

KEY REFERENCES

COP 19 Decision IG.22/19 on the Istanbul Environment Friendly City Award
https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/6083/16ig22_28_22_19_eng.pdf

WEBSITES

Istanbul Environment Friendly City Award | UNEPMAP

PHOTO/IMAGE