

# 15 YEARS

Union for the Mediterranean  
Union pour la Méditerranée  
الاتحاد من أجل المتوسط



## ANNUAL REPORT 2023



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# Message from the Secretary General Nasser Kamel



2023 has been an extremely challenging year for the Euro-Mediterranean region as a whole, let alone the Union for the Mediterranean. As I am writing these lines, the devastating escalation of the conflict between Israel and Palestine is still ongoing after more than 200 days. The unprecedented upsurge of violence and human toll has shaken the entire world, and questions our very sense of humanity.

2023 was also the year the Union for the Mediterranean celebrated its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the last of my mandate at the head of the organisation: it was the opportunity to take a step back and reflect on what we have achieved so far, and where we are collectively heading, to ensure we support and empower Mediterranean citizens to build the futures they aspire for.

**Little steps towards more trust, more understanding, and more cooperation, that will eventually help us consolidate the promise of shared peace, stability and prosperity in the Euro-Mediterranean region.**

With our Member States and partners, we launched a first reform process for the organisation, to assess its role, its functioning, and its impact throughout the years. However, due to the extraordinary situation across the region, we had to adapt and react: our Member States convened for the first time, in the framework of the 8<sup>th</sup> UfM Regional Forum, to solely discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, focusing on the grave situation in Gaza, its impact on the region and the way forward. The UfM Co-Chairs issued a joint communique that identified points of convergence emerging during the meeting, which you can go through in this report.

At the same time, we strived to continue responding to our peoples' needs, for inclusive growth, decent and fair socio-economic opportunities and a sustainable development that is able to address the urgent environmental and climate crises we are experiencing across the Mediterranean Basin.

The UfM was instrumental in 2023 in building a coalition that led to the launch of its biggest flagship initiative so far: the Blue Med Partnership. Initially mobilising an estimated €1 billion in investments, from more than six of the largest donors and financial institutions in the region, this initiative is a concrete progress in our global efforts to combat climate change and protect the Mediterranean Sea, and a true testimony of our convening power.

Further to that, we have also given a historical push forward to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, through the launch of the first structured joint initiative between the major institutions bound to Barcelona Process: the Mediterranean Capitals of Culture and Dialogue. Indeed, jointly coordinated by the UfM Secretariat and the Anna Lindh Foundation, and in close partnership with ARLEM, this initiative has reinforced the links between these institutions forming the immediate UfM ecosystem and enhances a true Mediterranean identity and sense of belonging.

Little steps towards more trust, more understanding, and more cooperation, that will eventually help us consolidate the promise of shared peace, stability and prosperity in the Euro-Mediterranean region. A promise we made more than 15 years to our citizens, and that we need more than ever to deliver on.

The UfM, as a regional framework, can and should be, a keystone in shaping a new vision for the future of the region. We look forward to continue building on that in the coming years, consolidating our mandate, our role and our capacity for action, together with our Member States, partners and citizens.

Thank you very much for walking this talk with us for so many years.



# The UfM at a glance

## What is the Union for the Mediterranean?

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) is an intergovernmental organisation that brings together 43 countries to enhance regional cooperation and dialogue through the implementation of concrete projects and initiatives addressing inclusive and sustainable development, stability and integration in the Euro-Mediterranean area.

As a direct continuation of the Barcelona Process, the launch of the UfM in July 2008 was a true reflection of its Member States' shared political commitment to enhance the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

## 43 Members

Albania / Algeria / Austria / Belgium / Bosnia and Herzegovina / Bulgaria / Croatia / Cyprus / Czech Republic / Denmark / Egypt / Estonia / Finland / France / Germany / Greece / Hungary / Ireland / Israel / Italy / Jordan / Latvia / Lebanon / Lithuania / Luxemburg / Malta / Mauritania / Monaco / Montenegro / Morocco / Netherlands / North Macedonia / Palestine / Poland / Portugal / Romania / Slovakia / Slovenia / Spain / Sweden / Syria\* / Tunisia / Türkiye

\*Syria suspended its membership in December 2011 | Libya has an observer status

## What is the Barcelona Process?

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, known as the Barcelona Process, is a dialogue framework born out

of a commitment to strengthen relations between Europe and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries, with the overall objective of establishing a Mediterranean area of peace, stability and shared prosperity. The Barcelona Process was focused around three main baskets: Political & Security; Economic & Financial; Social, Cultural & Human.

Since 2008, the UfM has reinforced the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, introducing a more structured and pragmatic framework of cooperation that addresses the root causes of the crises we face today.

## 2 Co-Presidents

The UfM aims to build a true partnership, based on the principles of co-ownership and equal footing between North and South. For that, it is co-chaired at each level of its governance: The EU and Jordan have respectively assumed the Northern and Southern co-presidency since 2012.

## 1 Secretariat

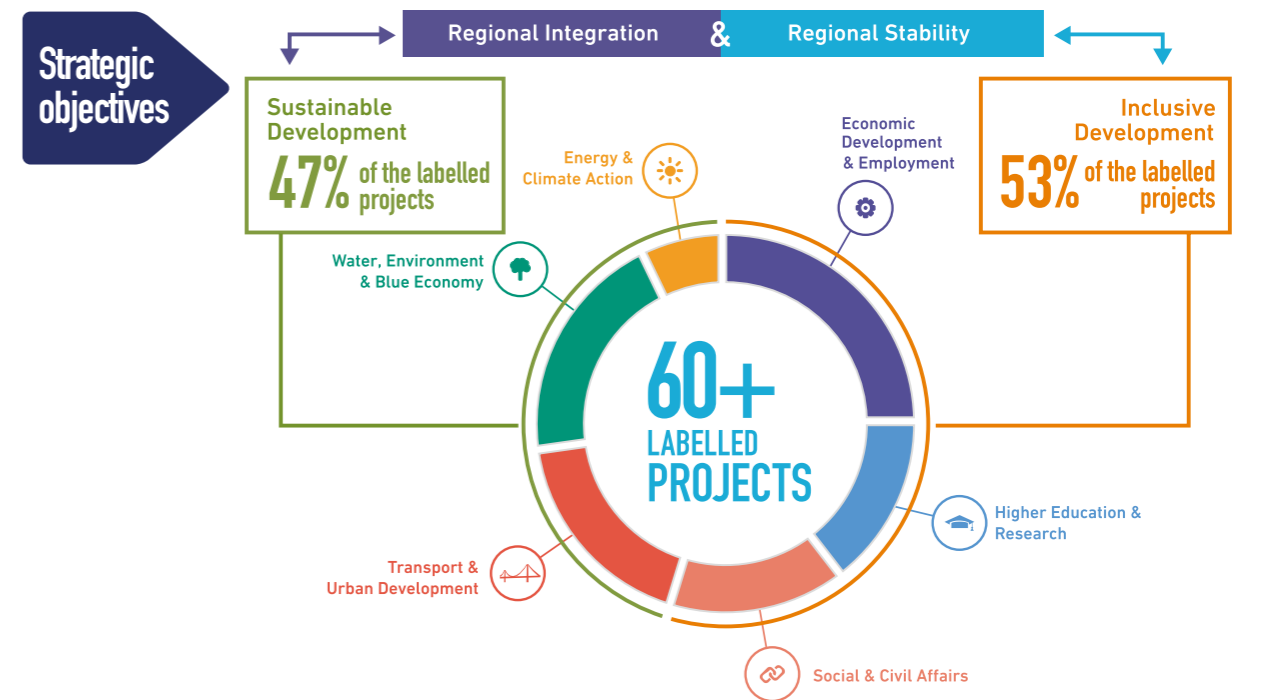
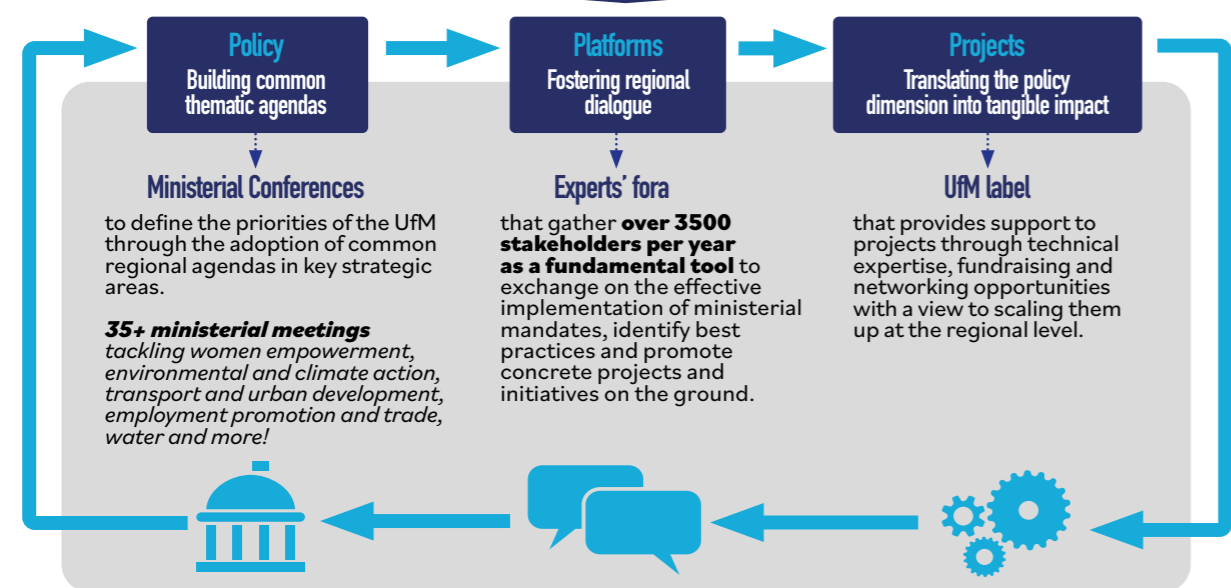
Established in 2010 in Barcelona, the UfM Secretariat is the first permanent structure dedicated to the implementation of this partnership.

It ensures operational follow-up of the regional priorities and supports the implementation of region-wide cooperation projects and initiatives.

### UfM Roadmap for Action:



## How does the UfM operationalize its mandate? The 3P's Methodology



## Building integrated, inclusive and sustainable societies: five renewed priorities for the UfM

In November 2020, on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Barcelona Process, UfM Member States recognised the need to prioritise, in the years to come, five areas of action where the UfM can play a crucial role and provide for comparative advantages towards a sustainable post-pandemic recovery, paving the way for the creation of more resilient societies and economies in the region.

## Starting in 2021, the UfM has focused its work on the following areas:



## Stories of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation

Our stories of successful Euro-Mediterranean cooperation are centered on humans and humans only. Our inspiration comes from UfM projects and initiatives implemented on the ground: from partners collaborating daily with us to project promoters and beneficiaries, these stories of regional cooperation aim at **giving a well-deserved spotlight to all the actors working tirelessly to make the Mediterranean a better place for all.**

Click or scan the QR code to discover our uplifting cooperation stories.





# 2023, a challenging year to reflect on

Check out the video recap here:



## Momentum for change: The UfM reform process

Landmark anniversaries not only call for commemorating what has been achieved, but are principally an occasion to reflect on the way forward.

UfM Member States took the opportunity of the organisation's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary to **launch a reflection on the role, functioning and efficiency of the UfM, building on its experience and results.** During these discussions, a consensus emerged on the need to strengthen the UfM and its Secretariat, to improve its existing work modalities, and to adapt its actions and resources to current circumstances across the Mediterranean region and at the global level. Several papers, presentations, and statements by the Co-Presidency, the Secretariat and Member States have put forward constructive proposals on the UfM's mandate, budget, and internal working procedures.

In line with these discussions, **specific proposals to reinforce the UfM's capacity for action and several other measures to improve its efficiency were included in a first reform package that was adopted in October 2023,** with a view to paving the way for follow-up measures that will gradually strengthen the sustainability of the UfM and its capacities in the future.



## The 8<sup>th</sup> UfM Regional Forum: A privileged platform for political dialogue across the Mediterranean

Amidst the tragic context that unfolded since October 2023, UfM Ministers of Foreign Affairs took the opportunity of the UfM Regional Forum, their annual gathering on the Mediterranean region, to discuss **the situation in Gaza-Palestine and Israel.**

Chaired by Josep Borrell, the High Representative of Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the EU and Vice President of the European Commission, and Ayman Safadi, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of Jordan, the event was hosted by José Manuel Albares, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation of Spain, in the presence of Prince Faisal bin Farhan, the Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, representing the Arab-Islamic Ministerial Committee.

8<sup>th</sup> UfM Regional Forum.  
27 November 2023,  
Barcelona, Spain.

In a joint communiqué, the UfM Co-Presidency identified points of convergence that emerged during the meeting:

- UfM Member States expressed grave concern over the humanitarian situation in Gaza.
- They stressed the need and obligation to protect civilians and to respect international humanitarian law by all and at all times and condemned indiscriminate killing and targeting of civilians.
- They stressed their rejection of any displacement of Palestinians from Gaza or the West Bank, as well as the internal displacement of Palestinians inside Gaza.
- They reaffirmed the collective responsibility to achieve a just, lasting, and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue on the basis of the two-state solution.
- They emphasised commitment to working together to realise the two-state solution as the only viable path to solving the Palestine-Israeli conflict and to ensure freedom and dignity for Palestinians, sustainable security for Israelis, and lasting peace and stability for the entire region.
- They called for implementing the two-state solution, with clear timelines and agreed implementation mechanisms, with two sovereign and secure states, Palestine and Israel, living side-by-side in peace and mutual recognition on the basis of the 4 June 1967 lines.

“ Israel and Palestine are founding members of our organisation. This leads us to actively reflect on the role of the UfM in building a long-lasting peace, built only and exclusively on the two states-solution.

Nasser Kamel  
UfM Secretary  
General

A role based on promoting concrete projects that could help consolidate peace.

War and vengeance can only lead to more brutality: the only way to ensure security is to collectively exert the necessary pressure to stop this conflagration, and to stop it now.



# 15 years: building bridges to grow together



## A legacy of partnership and a vision for the future

2023 marked a significant milestone for the Union for the Mediterranean – its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Established in Paris in 2008, the UfM brings together the European Union and countries on the Southern and Eastern shores of the Mediterranean. Its mission: to revitalize regional cooperation and unlock the potential for a more integrated and cohesive Mediterranean.

**But what is the Union for the Mediterranean? And why do we need it?** The answer in video:



## Concrete results, tangible impact

Since its inception, the UfM Secretariat has actively undertaken a diverse range of initiatives aimed at promoting regional inclusive and sustainable development as well as integration. The organisation has championed women's rights, job creation, enhanced connectivity efforts among countries and addressed environmental and climate emergencies.

**Learn more about the 15 flagship UfM initiatives:**



We invite you to discover a snippet of some of the UfM flagship initiatives, among many others, to build a better future for all:

### Employment

#### UfM Grant Schemes for employment promotion

Four projects have been awarded the first UfM Grants in 2020-2022, benefitting 18,000 individuals in seven UfM Member States.

### Gender Equality

#### Promoting women empowerment for industrial development in the MENA region

The project benefited 2000 female entrepreneurs involved in training, counselling and capacity-building sessions.

### Climate

#### First scientific report on climate and environmental change in the Mediterranean

This unique assessment for the region involved 190 scientists from 25 countries, all contributing in individual capacity and without financial compensation.

### Environment

#### Plastic Busters, for a Mediterranean free from litter

The project has involved 50+ regional marine litter experts to develop standardised plastic litter monitoring methods.

### Education

#### Mediterranean New Chance network

The project gathers over 220 second-chance centres across nine countries and benefits over 54,000 young people each school term.

### Urban Development

#### The UfM Urban Agenda and Housing Plan

The result of a 3-year collaboration between the European Commission and all UfM Member States, this strategic plan establishes a common vision to tackling urban challenges in the region.



Read the Op-ed signed by the UfM Co-Presidency and its Secretary General

Official website of the Mediterranean Capitals of Culture and Dialogue:



## The strength of unity

Embracing the cultural richness of the Euro-Mediterranean region, the UfM has launched, with the Anna Lindh Foundation, the **Mediterranean Capitals of Culture and Dialogue**.

Based on the call of **Ministers of Culture of the Euro-Mediterranean region** on 17 June 2022 in Naples (Italy), as well

as the **recommendation of more than 200 young representatives from civil society of over 20 countries** at the Forum des Mondes Méditerranéens in 2022 in Marseille (France), this initiative was built to further promote the diversity and shared identity of the Euro-Mediterranean region and contribute to a better mutual understanding of its peoples.

## How is the initiative shaped?

**2 cities** 1 North  
1 South

**1 year**

Highlighting the cities' rich Euro-Mediterranean cultural identities

Involving their populations in all their diversity

Culminating on the Day of the Mediterranean (28 November)



Following a Call for Applications throughout 2023, the first Mediterranean Capitals of Culture and Dialogue were unveiled at the end of the year: **Alexandria (Egypt) and Tirana (Albania)**.

Know more about the first capitals here:



Official website of the Day of the Mediterranean:



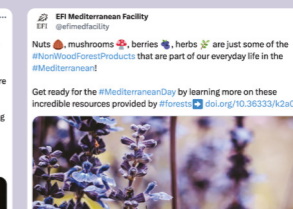
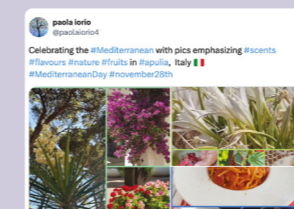
## A shared Mediterranean identity

Aligning with the launch of the Mediterranean Capitals of Culture and Dialogue, the 2023 campaign to mark the **Day of the Mediterranean** challenged the region's citizens to find the Mediterranean in their cities.

From street names honouring an important figure from the region, colourful mosaics of long-forgotten civilizations

or food specialties inspired by human movements throughout History, small pieces of the Mediterranean can be found where nobody expects them to!

- **50+ registered activities** under the framework of the Day of the Mediterranean
- **Hundreds of citizens and organisations** finding the Mediterranean in their surroundings



# Tackling urgent challenges



Climate change has profound implications for the planet, underscoring the critical need for environmental sustainability. The Mediterranean region, with its beautiful coastlines and diverse ecosystems, is increasingly exposed to rising sea levels, water scarcity, and extreme weather events. Climate change is exacerbating environmental risks, putting additional stress on coastal infrastructure and activities. This will not only have an impact on national economies, but also on vulnerable local communities that depend on the sea for their economic survival.

To address these challenges, the UfM put a **sustainable blue economy** at the heart of its mandate – to **tap into the economic potential of the Mediterranean Sea, while protecting it and preserving its unique and delicate ecosystems.**

**The Blue Mediterranean Partnership steps up support for a sustainable blue economy**  
In 2023, a **unique coalition of international financial institutions and donors joined hands with the UfM at COP28 to step up their contribution to the Blue Mediterranean Partnership** and tackle the threats our Sea

*The Mediterranean region is facing escalating environmental challenges exacerbated by climate change. Recognising this, the UfM is unwavering in its commitment to fostering environmental and climate across the region. Through collaborative efforts targeting both land and sea, the UfM seeks to support climate mitigation and adaptation efforts in the region, safeguarding its unique biodiversity, and empower its Mediterranean partners to safeguard their natural heritage and build resilient communities for a sustainable future.*

faces by coordinating the financing of blue economy projects through a new multi-donor fund, focusing initially on Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco.

The Blue Mediterranean Partnership was launched a year earlier, at COP27 in Egypt, and has already received strong political support from beneficiary countries and partners. It aims at supporting sustainable blue economy investments that crowd-in public and private sector finance. The Partnership also targets enhanced capacity on sustainable and innovative practices and in the design and delivery of projects. Finally, it aims to create and reinforce enabling environments for investments by supporting and developing strategies, policies, and regulatory frameworks.

The Partnership's priority areas include **plastic waste reduction, coastal resilience investments, sustainable tourism, wastewater treatment, circular economy, and marine biodiversity.**

A year after its launch, in Dubai, this multi-donor fund managed by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), secured additional funding from sovereign donors for pro-

ject preparation and blended finance: the European Commission announced a contribution of €1 million, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) contributed SEK 75 million (€6.5 million), and the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) announced a €2 million contribution. In the coming months, Germany and Spain are also expected to announce donations, with additional donors to follow. The fund aims to secure between €50 million and €100 million.

The European Investment Bank (EIB), AFD, Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW), Cassa di Risparmio di Padova e Rovigo (CR) and the EBRD will act as implementing financial institutions and cooperate to co-finance blue economy projects. **The UfM will be the only non-contributing member of the steering committee and will facilitate political and regulatory dialogue, attesting to its central role in bridging actors for the success of this initiative.** It will support capacity-building and the strengthening of institutions while backing policy reform to create an environment that is conducive to successful blue economy projects, an essential step when it co-

mes to fostering effective coordination and cooperation among all parties and, by extension, to capitalising on opportunities for sustainable blue economy investments.

## Promoting corporate ocean responsibility to safeguard the sea

A driving force in the Mediterranean, the sustainable blue economy holds great potential to boost the sustainable development of traditional and emerging maritime economic sectors. It can also support livelihoods by creating new and quality 'blue' jobs across the region, in addition to tackling climate change and ensuring the health of marine and coastal ecosystems, while protecting the crucial environmental services they provide.

To tap into this potential, in 2023 the UfM signed a partnership with the World Ocean Council (WOC) to boost private sector engagement and stewardship in the Mediterranean sustainable blue economy. Within the framework of the 2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy and the Roadmap for its implementation, the partnership aims to



## Meet the World Ocean Council

The WOC is a global ocean industry leadership alliance committed to corporate ocean responsibility. Developed by and for the private sector, it takes a unique approach to tackling cross-cutting issues affecting sustainable development, science, and stewardship of the seas.

The WOC engages with and brings together leaders from various ocean industries, including shipping, oil and gas, fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, renewable energy (wind, wave, ti-

dal), ports, dredging, cables, as well as the maritime legal, financial and insurance communities, and others to collaborate towards the responsible use of the seas. The Council ensures that the ocean business community's role in ocean sustainable development is understood by all relevant stakeholders.

Their network currently includes more than 35,000 ocean industry and media stakeholders around the world.

**The Mediterranean Sea is a world's biodiversity hotspot.**

It harbours around **11%** of all marine species in less than 1% of the global marine area.

with around **20%** of those species being endemic.



promote cooperation, engagement, and corporate responsibility from business and investment communities involved in the maritime and marine sectors and conducting activities at the Mediterranean level.

Among other key areas, **this strategic cooperation will focus on blue business development and entrepreneurship, blue skills, careers, and jobs and employability in the Mediterranean blue economy.** It will also target sustainable investments in the blue economy and the blue finance process in the Mediterranean.

**First concrete steps of the Plan of Action for a Model Mediterranean Sea (PAMEx) by 2030**

PAMEx is a political blueprint that seeks to accelerate action for nature and climate in the Mediterranean. It operates as a voluntary platform, aiming to foster increased coordination and partnerships among countries and regional organisations, and to **raise the profile of the region as a role model, leading the transition towards an equitable, carbon neutral and nature positive world.**

PAMEx is structured around four pillars, in line with the 2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration on the Blue Economy:

- Raising the ambition for the preservation of marine biodiversity in the Mediterranean;
- Promoting and developing sustainable fishing, to end overfishing by 2030;

- Redoubling efforts to combat marine pollution, so that no plastic is discharged into the Mediterranean by 2030;
- Promoting maritime transport practices that protect the marine environment and combat climate change.

The UfM Secretariat is a core member of the initiative, working in close partnership with the PAMEx technical secretariat, hosted by the Coordinating Unit of the Mediterranean Action Plan of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP/MAP). In January and July 2023, the UfM joined its first Steering Committee meetings, to follow up with all partners on the implementation of the 20 concrete actions that PAMEx encompasses, including governance and the functioning of the Local Investment Finance Facility (PLIFF).

A declaration on Marine and Coastal Protected Areas was launched to step up the ambition for the protection of marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean region. A monitoring and reporting framework to track progress under each component is also under preparation, building on other existing frameworks and strategies.

The platform is open to new partners from the Mediterranean and its surrounding region, who are willing to contribute towards the same objectives.

Read the full PAMEx Declaration on Marine and Coastal Protected Areas here:



Do you remember?

The launch of the **\$1 billion USD PAMEx 2030 Local Finance Investment Facility (PLIFF)** .....

took place in the **Mediterranean Pavilion, coordinated by the UfM, during the COP27 in Sharm-el-Sheikh!**

Read more about what took place at the **MedPavilion** here:



Zoom on Euro-Mediterranean projects

# TouMaLi (Tourism Marine Litter)

Labelled by UfM Member States in May 2023, the overall goal of the project is to **minimise the volume of waste from the tourism sector in the target countries and to recycle and reuse unavoidable waste.** The goal is to sustainably reduce the amount of marine and beach litter and to protect marine and coastal ecosystems. TouMaLi assesses the main sources and quantities of marine litter in target tourism destinations and provides sustainable solutions.

## How?

Establishing a network involving decision-makers, experts, specialists, professors, the private sector, and students from all participating countries in the tourism sector.

Documenting marine litter quantities, composition, and sources to identify major issues and items, serving as a basis for sustainable litter management solutions.

Developing legal, institutional, and technical solutions tailored to local conditions for adoption in pilot projects.

Implementing training and capacity building programmes for waste management staff through targeted workshops.

## Expected Results

- Establishment of national and local communication structures and provision of background data on pollution, waste management, and recycling.
- Development of waste management strategies in the tourism industry tailored to each pilot area.
- Implementation of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) concepts at the national level,

- focusing on products contributing to marine litter, benefiting the tourism sector through financial mechanisms and waste reverse chains.
- Creation of a citizen science marine litter monitoring programme, beach pollution assessments, and identification of litter sources to evaluate the effectiveness of waste reduction measures.

## Location

Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia

## Duration

48 months

## Total cost

€ 4,231,539.78

## Project promoter

University of Rostock (Germany)

Visit our **hub** of news and updates on the **Mediterranean sustainable blue economy**:



### Linking local blue economy ecosystems to regional advancements

Barcelona, home to the UfM Secretariat, has a rich blue economy ecosystem and is increasingly becoming an international hub for sustainable blue economy players. The city also launched its Blue Economy Strategy in 2021, with a view to making this sector a vector for job creation, economic and social development, and innovation.

In this context, the UfM Secretariat took part in Barcelona REACT 2023 Economic Reactivation Days, organised by the Barcelona City Council, with the goal of linking and sharing best practices and experiences between leading local blue economy ecosystems and the regional dimension. The UfM considers

it essential to boost the sectors and activities of the Mediterranean sustainable blue economy community, as well as to bring stakeholders together to achieve better convergence and coordination of efforts.

REACT is a meeting point for Barcelona's economic sectors, bringing experts together with local, national, and international leaders to reflect on the next decade's economic outlook and on key ongoing projects at local level. It offered a unique occasion to identify new capacity-building opportunities and to foster discussions around the replication potential in other Mediterranean areas of successful initiatives, projects, programmes, and processes.



# Monaco Blue Initiative

## Identifying the multidimensional challenges to the Mediterranean Sea



More on the work undertaken by the Monaco Blue Initiative:



A 14<sup>th</sup> edition of the Monaco Blue Initiative (MBI), led by the Foundation of the Oceanographic Institute of Monaco, was organised in March 2023. The UfM Secretary General, Nasser Kamel, was among the main speakers invited to this discussion platform, which draws together, each year, the key players in the ocean sector.

Organised during Monaco Ocean Week, this initiative fosters dialogue as it offers an outstanding opportunity to discuss current and future global challenges of ocean management and conservation in concrete, operational, and prospective terms.



### Harvesting hope: empowering youth to combat land abandonment in the Mediterranean region

**Land abandonment rates in the Mediterranean have surged, reaching as high as 30%.** This alarming trend not only jeopardises our region's cultural landscapes but also threatens the invaluable services they provide.

Raising awareness on the challenges posed by land abandonment and co-finding solutions with tomorrow's leaders is of paramount importance to ensure a sustainable future for all.

To that end, the European Forest Institute, in partnership with the UfM, organised the Young Leadership Programme Mediterranean 2023 in Barcelona, Spain, in October. Welcoming participants from Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Türkiye, the gathering strived to develop innovative solutions to address the pressing challenges and opportunities associated with land abandonment and forests in the Mediterranean region. The programme aimed to **equip participants with the scientific knowledge and essential soft skills needed to become effective and influential leaders** and to **explore**

**opportunities for sustainable entrepreneurship, jobs and biodiversity conservation.**

The Young Leadership Programme Mediterranean 2023 is deeply rooted in the UfM 2030 GreenerMed agenda. The three thematic areas of the GreenerMed agenda are closely intertwined and demand equal attention, **youth engagement being a cross-cutting theme that is high on the list of regional priorities.**

### Moving towards integrated management of forests in Tunisia

Despite an increase of 1.8 million hectares of forest between 2010 and 2015, there are 80 million hectares of degraded land – including forests – in the Mediterranean. **More than 400,000 hectares of forests are burned every year and at least 16% of animal and plant species in Mediterranean forests are threatened with extinction** due to global threats such as climate change.

It is therefore becoming increasingly urgent to set regional and global targets for forest and landscape restoration, and to properly identify and implement low-cost, long-term strategies, considering that most restoration initiatives involving tree planting are often costly and their application in the region may be limited.

In line with its strategic objectives to protect the environment and biodiversity, the UfM Secretariat co-organised in March 2023 a **regional capacity building workshop for Mediterranean countries on the restoration of degraded forest landscapes.** Held in collaboration with the FAO and the General Directorate of Forests of Tunisia, the workshop shared knowledge related to the restoration of degraded Mediterranean forest landscapes, with a focus on the assessment and planning of restoration. In particular, it examined the role of Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR) as a low cost-opportunity

Check out the **2030 GreenerMed Agenda** here:



## Land abandonment

Land abandonment is the process where previously utilised land is left unused due to factors like economic shifts or environmental degradation. This leads to ecological damage, increased wildfire risks, and loss of agricultural productivity. Furthermore, carbon emissions may increase, and cultural heritage can be lost. Addressing this issue requires comprehensive strategies involving sustainable land management, community engagement, and economic incentives to revitalise abandoned areas and mitigate their adverse effects on ecosystems and societies.



to conserve biodiversity and improve ecosystem services, including carbon sequestration and watershed protection. Overall, the workshop gave participants a better understanding of the

context of Mediterranean forest and landscape restoration, while providing an opportunity to enhance regional dynamics and knowledge sharing.

**The UfM Secretariat has been working with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on a labelled project dedicated to forest and landscape restoration in Lebanon and Morocco since 2018.**

**Check out our video for more information on the project:**



## Water

Just as melting ice caps have become symbolic of climate change in the Arctic, the shortage of water has become the image most commonly associated with this same emergency in much of the Mediterranean. With a rapidly growing population, and more than 180 million people affected by water poverty, joining forces to address this common challenge is of the utmost importance.

**From challenge to opportunity: unlocking investment for water security in the Euro-Mediterranean and Africa**

Water finance and investments play a critical role in addressing the **water-food-energy-ecosystems (WEFE) nexus** by enabling integrated solutions, resource optimisation, infrastructure development, sustainability, and collaborative initiatives.

Learn more about the conference and its outcomes in this video:



Recognising that water security is of utmost importance to the Euro-Mediterranean region and Africa, **the UfM and the European Union joined forces with the African Development Bank for the first time** ever to organise a Conference on Water Finance and Investments, in partnership with the Egyptian Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation and with support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. Held during the last quarter of 2023 in Cairo, Egypt, the conference brought together government officials, water experts, and financial institutions to discuss **financing solutions that consider the interconnectedness of water, energy, food, and ecosystems, aiming to improve the quality and sustainability of water investments while attracting new sources of finance.**

At the conference, **the UfM highlighted its commitment to developing a WEFE nexus strategic framework for the Mediterranean**, while emphasising that financing water projects through a WEFE lens can:

- Reduce costs and attract more investment;
- Improve the effectiveness and sustainability of water investments;
- Lead to reformed subsidies that minimise negative impacts across sectors.

**Beyond desalination: unveiling new ideas for water security in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean**

Securing adequate financing for water projects remains a priority for the Mediterranean region, particularly in Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries. The UfM is dedicated to enhancing the sustainability of national water systems through initiatives like peer-learning sessions, the UfM Annual Conference on Water Investment and Financing (see p. 16-17), and expert training on developing bankable project proposals.

In collaboration with the Spanish Agency for Cooperation (AECID), the UfM Secretariat hosted in February 2023 a pivotal session within the Arab Water Convention held in Dubai. This session, termed the Design Thinking Challenge (Future Lab), showcased **innovative ideas aimed at enhancing the financial viability of non-conventional water resources (NCWR)** in the Mediterranean region. Recognising the interconnected nature of hydrological resources, experts underscored the importance of adopting an Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) approach. Unlike traditional sector-by-sector approaches, IWRM emphasises holistic resource management practices.

As demands on water resources intensify, the utilisation of NCWR has emer-

### Euro-Med success stories

*When a craft is born in Syria and flourishes in Jordan*

**The Smart DESERT project was launched to empower vulnerable Jordanians, and Syrian refugees through agricultural development**

Read on to learn more about Abu-Fawaz's story here:



ged as a sustainable solution. However, some methods, such as desalination, pose significant financial burdens. To mitigate these costs, it is of paramount importance to leverage renewable energy sources.



What is it?

## Non-conventional water resources

Non-conventional water resources refer to alternative sources of water beyond traditional freshwater reservoirs, such as rivers and lakes. These resources typically include treated wastewater, desalinated seawater, harvested rainwater, reclaimed water from industrial processes, and brackish groundwater. Non-conventional water resources are becoming increasingly important in water-stressed regions where conventional sources are insufficient to meet growing demand.

### Preserving our shared water: the 5<sup>th</sup> Mediterranean Water Forum kick-off meeting

The UfM, along with the Mediterranean Water Institute (IME), the World Water Council, and the governments of Spain and Tunisia, hosted a critical gathering in October 2023, in Valencia, Spain. This kick-off meeting for the 5<sup>th</sup> Mediterranean Water Forum served as a platform for a diverse group of participants to discuss pressing water challenges facing the region.

Water experts, government officials, industry leaders, environmental groups, and representatives from various institutions and organisations came together. Their discussions mirrored the central themes at the upcoming 10<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum in Bali, including:

- The interconnectedness of water, energy, food, and ecosystems
- Envisioning water supply and demand by 2050
- Preventing droughts and floods
- Water law and conflict resolution
- Financing sustainable water solutions
- Innovations in water use

Participants split into working groups based on the key themes. These in-depth discussions allowed for the exchange of ideas and experience. A central message emerged: effective solutions are urgently needed to guarantee water security, especially considering the region's unique challenges, which include population growth, economic pressures, and climate change, all of which significantly impact water management.

**A focus on connecting water with environmental protection is crucial, with emphasis on the vital role of investment and private sector involvement.** Participants also explored how water management can be tailored to specific local needs, identifying best practices and technologies that can help address the region's water security challenges.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Mediterranean Water Forum kick-off meeting fostered a spirit of collaboration. Experts, stakeholders, and policymakers came together with a shared goal: finding sustainable so-

Check out the **video-recap** of the meeting **here:**



lutions to the Mediterranean's water challenges. This spirit of cooperation will continue as participants further develop concepts for the different themes to be addressed at the upcoming forum.

Zoom on Euro-Mediterranean projects

## MENA Water Matchmaker 2

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, distinct geographical, ecological, and cultural factors shape a landscape marked by water scarcity, demographic shifts, and urbanisation. The WEFE nexus addresses these challenges by bolstering water, energy, and food security while preserving ecosystems and promoting sustainable consumption patterns.

The MENA Water Matchmaker 2 successfully **used renewable solar energy to pump treated wastewater for irrigation, benefitting nearby farmlands in Jordan and Palestine.** Directly impacting more than 40 farmers, the project supported families and created seasonal job opportunities with a high focus on women and youth.

### How?

- Three technical field interventions conducted in As-Salt municipality, Jordan, and Sa'ir, Palestine, which included building constructed wetlands for wastewater treatment, tree planting in irrigation areas, installing irrigation networks, and solar power stations to cover pumping costs.
- Capacity development and mentorship programmes conducted in Jordan and Palestine through training courses, with a focus on gender and youth.
- Regional events organised for sharing experiences and cross-fertilisation on WEFE nexus technical applications.

### Results

Direct beneficiaries:

- No. of families benefiting by the project: **Jordan 5 / Palestine 6**
- No. of farmers engaged in the project: **Jordan 8 / Palestine 17**
- No. of female farmers engaged in the project: **Jordan 2 / Palestine 3**
- No. of young scientists, researchers, and trainees: **Jordan 2 / Palestine 2**
- No. decision-makers, managers involved in the project: **Jordan 8 / Palestine 6**

In addition to direct beneficiaries, the project had a regional dimension attained through several cross-fertilisation events and capacity building activities with a cross-country approach and towards regional benefits for MENA countries.

<b>Location</b>	Jordan, Palestine
<b>Duration</b>	From 1 September 2020 to 30 June 2023
<b>Total cost</b>	€ 1,582,493 <i>Fully funded by Sida</i>
<b>Project promoter</b>	Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean (GWP-Med)



## Food

### Guaranteeing food security, resilience, and sustainability

The food industry has a major impact on our environment, societies, and economies. Skyrocketing energy prices, staggering inflation rates and supply chain disruptions have led to volatile prices and food shortages across the whole Euro-Mediterranean region. Additionally, the sector is deeply connected to and affected by climate change. Therefore, the food industry requires more innovative and sustainable practices to guarantee food security.

In this context, the UfM, in partnership with the League of Arab States and with the support of the German Development Cooperation, organised a High-Level Conference on Food Industry for Food Security. At the conference, which took place in October 2023 in Cairo, Egypt, various Euro-Mediterranean stakeholders discussed the current state of the food industry and strategies to improve its resilience and to foster sustainable practices.

### To learn more

#### HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON FOOD INDUSTRY FOR A SUSTAINABLE FOOD SECURITY

Towards more resilient regional supply chains and a more sustainable food industry

Cairo  
22 and 23  
October 2023

The participants in the High-Level Conference on Food Industry for Food Security identified key challenges, opportunities, and best practices, all of which have been included in the outcome document of the conference.

You can find it here:



Participants highlighted the urgent need to increase our efforts to guarantee food security in the region. The discussions were organised in three thematic panels:

**1. State of play of the food industry in the region:**  
Key challenges faced by the food sector and the importance of government policies to provide support.

**2. How to enhance the resilience of the food industry:**  
The relation between climate change resilience and food system productivity.

**3. How to make the food industry more sustainable and inclusive:**  
Best practices and initiatives towards sustainability and resource efficiency, such as including more women in the sector, creating qualified jobs or further digitalisation.

To fully understand the food industry and to provide innovative and sustainable strategies, it is crucial to be in touch with all stages of the production process and with all stakeholders. Consequently, the event included a field visit to different food production companies in Egypt, **coordinated by the Egyptian Food Export Council**. The participants could see first-hand food processing and packaging processes in the fruit sector and they had the opportunity to discuss with industry leaders the challenges they face.

### Advocating for food security through global partnerships

As a global issue, food security is also present in the agendas of many international organisations. Therefore, the UfM Secretariat takes part in events, conferences and roundtables organised by the international community to **draw**

**attention to the Euro-Mediterranean region.** In July 2023, in Rome, the UN Food Systems Summit +2 Stocktaking Moment took place at the FAO premises, in collaboration with other UN Agencies, the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub and the wider UN system.

This conference was an opportunity to review progress on the commitments to action regarding the 2021 Food Systems Summit, establish future priorities and advocate for urgent action.

In this framework, the UfM Secretariat and PRIMA supported the organisation of a session on **“Healthy Diets, Cultures and Tradition: Lessons from the Mediterranean Diet.”**

The session aimed at valorising the features that define the Mediterranean diet: **local food policies, collaboration of business actors around the principles of circular economy, engagement of the academic community to investigate health and environmental impacts.** These principles demonstrate how something as mundane as the Mediterranean diet can also trigger a cultural, social, and economic regeneration with food at its core. Consequently, **this session positioned the Mediterranean diet as a good practice for preserving traditional diets and lifestyles while promoting the enhancement of local agricultural industries.** To build on this momentum, FAO, with the support of the Italian government, announced the launch of an observatory dedicated to sharing knowledge, experience, tools and materials related to the Mediterranean diet.

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**40%**  
**of the entire human population could not afford a healthy diet in 2020**



## Watch Letter #41: Youth Commitment to Sustainable Food Systems – A Mediterranean overview



Check out their articles in the WatchLetter:



The impacts of climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and recent conflicts pose a particular threat to rural and agricultural communities, who are already affected by development challenges, environmental degradation, drought and gradual land abandonment. Their food supply systems are undermined as a result, threatening their livelihoods, and increasing the risk of poverty and vulnerability.

The challenging context of the rural sector also affects the Mediterranean youth, especially in terms of training and employment opportunities. Many young people today have neither the skills nor the capital or land to access or create profitable employment in rural and agricultural areas. Nonetheless, young people are crucial actors in sustainable development and the green economy and, as such, they need to be considered as decision-makers. Youth voices demand to be more recognised, valued and supported by institutions and governments.

In this context, **this joint publication by CIHEAM, the UfM and CMI-UNOPS comprises articles written by young people, giving voice to young researchers, entrepreneurs and activists with ideas and projects for a different kind of rural and agricultural development in the Mediterranean region.**

### Fostering resilience: Uniting Mediterranean shores through research and innovation

Food security is challenged by conflicts, climate change and economic instability. The development of resilience policies, either in the food, economic or any other sector, needs to be accompanied by research and innovation initiatives that promote cooperation between the two shores of the Mediterranean. The UfM is determined to make use of regional dialogue events and platforms to underscore the importance of scientific and academic communities. A clear example in January 2023 was the high-level mission to Egypt on agri-

culture, agri-food, and food security, led by the Italian government, where the UfM Secretariat represented the international organisations part of the Mediterranean Ministerial Dialogue on the Food Crisis, held in 2022.

The high-level mission aimed at discussing the scientific and cultural partnerships between Italy and Egypt, with a particular focus on the existing PRIMA initiative and its innovative agri-food economic projects. Additionally, the UfM Secretariat used this opportunity to highlight the importance of public-private partnerships to support



Agri-food products made by the beneficiaries of the FLOWER Project, which benefitted from the 1<sup>st</sup> UfM Grant Scheme to promote employment and sustainable practices.

innovation and sustainability in the Mediterranean. Research projects such as the existing PRIMA projects can contribute to job creation, better and more sustainable productivity and to the digitalisation of the agricultural sector.



What is it?

## Mediterranean Initiative in Horizon Europe 2023–2024

Horizon Europe is an EU funded research programme that covers actions to support and strengthen international initiatives in renewable energies, food systems, global health, environmental observations and more.

The Horizon Europe work programme 2023-2024, with a budget of around €13.5 billion, aims at supporting researchers and innovators in Europe to pursue breakthrough solutions for environmental, energy, digital and geopolitical challenges.

This work programme introduces the new ‘Mediterranean Initiative’, as a response to the new research and innovation agenda developed with the UfM.

2023 also marked a milestone on Research and Innovation for the UfM. **The European Commission and the UfM presented the “Mediterranean Initiative”, which has been included within Horizon Europe as part of its working programme for 2023-2024. This initiative includes a series of R&I calls that are open to Mediterranean countries over both years and that follow the three main themes of the UfM Roadmaps: climate change, renewable energies, and health.**

This launch, together with the Mediterranean Ministerial Dialogue on the Food Crisis, set the grounds for a roundtable discussion on research and innovation and PRIMA projects, held in March 2023. Both CIHEAM and the UfM participated in the roundtable, which focused on possible ways to expand academic collaboration in the Mediterranean region and how to take advantage of existing projects and initiatives.



(\*) You can consult the document here:



### Research and innovation community meets at UfM to explore the potential of science diplomacy

Scientific collaboration and knowledge sharing have emerged as outstanding tools to promote peaceful relations between nations and to solve global challenges. This practice, which encourages sustainable development through global cooperation, is widely known as science diplomacy. In a context where science-policy platforms are increasingly needed, the UfM, in partnership with the European Commission, co-organised the Euro-Mediterranean Conference on Science Diplomacy in October 2023 in Barcelona. More than 80 participants from 22 countries, including scientists, diplomats, and research officials, discussed the opportunities, obstacles, and potential future strategies for science diplomacy in the Mediterranean. The participants flagged that science diplomacy action can be fostered by:

1. **Research infrastructures:** that can bring scientists together across borders, ensuring North-South collaboration, while benefiting local communities.
2. **Mobility and training:** which should lead to the building of communities of practice.
3. **Science's role in foreign policy:** with increased channels of exchange between diplomats and researchers.

The participants drafted an outcome document that summarised their views on the role of science diplomacy in the Mediterranean: "Fostering Science Diplomacy in the Mediterranean Region".(\*)

**Science-policy platforms are a tangible element of science diplomacy:** they are spaces that bring together the scientific community and policy-makers and that offer an opportunity for dialogue, collaboration, and knowledge sharing. One of the main goals of the UfM is to be able to provide these spaces for dialogue. Therefore, the conference was followed by the 20th Meeting of the UfM Regional Platform on Research and Innovation, to track the progress on the UfM Roadmaps and the newly launched Horizon Europe: Mediterranean Initiative. The participants also agreed on the next steps towards creating a Knowledge Management and Communication Framework Platform (KMCFP), a one-stop-shop for researchers and innovators in the Mediterranean region.



## Meet PRIMA

The Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean (PRIMA) is a joint programme created in the framework of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. It brings together 19 countries that have a common research strategy on the environment, water, food security and health in the Mediterranean. By funding R&I through competitive calls, PRIMA focuses on developing knowledge and common innovative solutions and capacities for agri-food systems to make them sustainable, and for integrated water provision and management in the region.



Learn more about PRIMA and its projects:



# Transitioning for the future



### Accelerating the Mediterranean's shift towards a green, circular, and inclusive economy for climate resilience

Adopted in 2021, the 2<sup>nd</sup> UfM Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Climate Action aims to fast-track the region's transition to a green, circular and inclusive economy and promote climate resilience while endorsing the **2030 GreenMed Agenda**. Officials from the UfM Working Group on Environment and Climate Change's Member States, as well as key stakeholders including the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), the United Nations Environment Programme's Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP MAP), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the European Forest Institute

red information on current activities on climate change and the environment, their main policy actions, and ongoing efforts to restore biodiversity and address climate change. Attendees reiterated the importance of the 2030 Greener Med Agenda and agreed to take stock of progress achieved in this arena once again in 2024.

### UfM grant scheme promotes employment and entrepreneurship in the green economy

**Promoting green jobs and empowering women as drivers of sustainable development is essential to ensuring the green transition becomes a reality.** Last year, the UfM launched a grant scheme, with financial backing

from the the German Development Cooperation and the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), to help promote the green economy in Southern Mediterranean countries.

The scheme provides nonprofits that advance the green

**The scheme provides nonprofits that advance the green transition in an inclusive and socially just way through projects in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia with €150,000 to €300,000 per initiative.**

and Clima-Med, gathered in Barcelona in 2023 to discuss progress related to the scope of the Declaration.

They welcomed efforts to improve monitoring and reporting on the state of the environment in the region with the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and the Euro-Mediterranean Statistical Cooperation programme MEDSTAT V. They also sha-

transition in an inclusive and socially just way through projects in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia with €150,000 to €300,000 per initiative. In addition to funds for these specific projects, which are between six and 12 months long and are set to start in 2024, grantees are also given access to the UfM's technical expertise, networking opportunities and visibility.



## The 2030 GreenerMed Agenda

The UfM's Environment Agenda, also known as the 2030 GreenerMed Agenda, was endorsed by Member States in 2021 to create a structured regional framework that coordinates existing projects and programmes to accelerate the Euro-Mediterranean transition towards a green, circular, and inclusive economy.

The Agenda addresses key environmental issues in the Mediterranean that require cooperation across borders and sectors, and was developed collaboratively with countries and stakeholders, linking local experiences with decision-making processes at national, regional and international levels.

**Find out how the 2030 Greener Med Agenda is helping us advance towards a greener tomorrow!**



The first edition of the scheme took place in 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and benefitted 18,000 individuals, mainly women and young people, through four projects that worked to tackle labour challenges and further empower women in the fields of business, sustainable tourism, education and research. These initiatives were located in seven UfM Member States: Greece, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco and Tunisia.

### Driving change: A green transition for a brighter tomorrow

Research and innovation are key to strengthening Euro-Mediterranean economies and improving students'

and researchers' employment prospects. And yet, around 25% of higher education graduates in North Africa are unemployed. At the same time, up to a third of companies in the region cite a lack of labour skills among candidates as an impediment to hiring. **As societies move forward with the green transition, fostering green knowledge and skills are central to reverse this trend.**

The UfM partnered with the German Development Cooperation to this effect in 2020 and has since then embarked on a joint effort to support dialogue between academia, the business sector and policymakers in order to promote regional sustainable economy goals. As part of these activities, the UfM published a study in 2023 titled "Green Innovation and Employability through the Triple Helix" in collaboration with UNIMED, the Mediterranean Universities Union, that focuses on the role of industry, government and universities in Jordan, Italy and Tunisia. The study concludes that although the region is at a crossroads and faces epochal socio-economic and climate-related challenges, **the green transition can change these issues into opportunities by:**

1. Serving as a tool against youth unemployment;
2. Easing pressure on scarce natural resources;
3. Overhauling inefficient infrastructures.

These challenges will require a new approach to finance mechanisms, pu-

Read of the full study on Green Innovation and Employability here:



blic policies, and resources for entrepreneurship, but most of all will require continued and reinforced efforts to link education with innovation, the dual needs of jobs markets and sustainability.

The UfM and UNIMED also organised a series of roundtable discussions on the axes of this study in the three countries in partnership with Jordan's Higher Council for Science and Technology, the Italian Ministry of Universities and Research, and the Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. Members of the academic and community, as well as the private and public sectors discussed how research can contribute to socio-economic development and lead to the improved employability of graduates and young researchers while also propelling the green transition forward.

### EU Green Week 2023: Making the green transition gender inclusive

EU Green Week is an annual opportunity to raise awareness and discuss environmental policy in the region. As part of EU Green Week 2023, the UfM co-hosted an online session in June tit-

led "Women as key players in greening Mediterranean food systems: drivers and challenges" alongside FAO, CIHEAM and PRIMA. The webinar provided 200 online attendees, comprising a diverse group of public and private sector representatives, with a platform to discuss **how to tackle gender gaps in the sector and empower women to build resilient and inclusive food systems.**

Panellists from civil society, the private sector, and academia provided insight into how women can play a role in sustainable food systems, particularly in rural areas, and on how to build effective regional cooperation to support a green and gender inclusive transition, keeping in mind the opportunities this offers women. Participants emphasised the importance of women's access to finance, incubators, and networks as well as the need for regional cooperation to make the just and green transition in food sovereignty a reality. They also drew attention to the significance of creating platforms where women working on climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies can speak to each other about their own experiences and exchange knowledge.

### Euro-Med success stories

## Building a green future in Morocco and beyond

**“ I did not see myself as a woman entrepreneur, I simply saw myself as an entrepreneur, with the objective of carrying out a project that addresses environmental and economic issues.**

Learn more about Fatima Zahra Beraich's quest to optimise waste management!



Dr Fatima Zahra Beraich  
Founder of Biodôme







# Inclusive green economy

Source and infographic: European Environment Agency (EEA)

The European Environment Agency (EEA) defines a green economy as one in which resources are used efficiently and natural systems are maintained thanks to environmental, economic, and social policies and innovations.

Inclusive green economies enable people to improve their living environments and have decent jobs while allowing businesses to increase profits through more environmentally-conscious practices.



## Climate change

### Making the Mediterranean more resilient to climate change

In a region where the average temperature rise already surpasses the 1.5°C threshold set in the Paris Agreement and where, with current policies, they are expected to increase by 2.2°C compared to pre-industrial levels by 2040, taking concrete action against climate change is crucial. The UfM par-

ticipated in a range of activities to this effect, from joining the Local2030 Islands Network to joining MedCOP, the annual gathering of Mediterranean stakeholders for climate action, or stepping up support for the Blue Mediterranean Partnership (see pg. 10-11 for more information) at COP28, where it continued to lead the Mediterranean Coalition.



# The Mediterranean Coalition

Launched at COP27 in 2022, the Mediterranean Coalition is an alliance of 11 like-minded Mediterranean stakeholders coordinated by the UfM in collaboration with the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM), Ecomondo, the Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association, Fondazione Enrico Mattei, Friedrich Naumann Foundation For Freedom, Interreg Next Med, the Mediterranean Climate House, MedWaves, the PAMEX Local Investment Finance Facility (PLIFF) and the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA). It aims at voicing the Mediterranean challenges and concerns at global level, enabling space for finding solutions, and reaching new agreements. It was present at the COP28 Blue Zone with a "Mediterranean Coalition Office".



The Mediterranean Sea is home to 10,000 islands, of which 2,000, including the UfM island Member States of Cyprus and Malta, host permanent dwellings. **It is also warming at a rate 20% faster than the global average, making it one of the world's main climate change hotspots.** Faced with this challenge, the UfM joined the Local2030 Islands Network at an official side event at the 2023 UN Islands Leading on Localised SDG Implementation Forum. This island-led peer-to-peer organisation works to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through locally driven solutions. It promotes engagement among islands and partners, allowing them to share experiences, knowledge, and best practices.

The UfM advanced the Euro-Mediterranean region's role in the fight against climate change at MedCOP, which took place in Tangier, Morocco, ahead of the meeting of global actors in Dubai in late 2023. Significantly, the UfM was represented on the "How to include gender equality in climate policies" panel, organised by UN Women Morocco to help consolidate a regional dynamic for local action and to generate operational tools to meet climate goals.

At COP28 in Dubai in late 2023, the UfM reinforced its integral role in the Mediterranean Coalition and strengthened Euro-Mediterranean climate action by facilitating new measures such as the signing of the Blue Mediterranean Partnership cooperation agreement. It also further consolidated the region's role in the global climate change arena by participating in the EU Pavilion's high-level roundtable session on Euro-Mediterranean clean tech cooperation, reiterating its engagement with partnerships and initiatives that foster sustainable and inclusive development.

Finally, the UfM also organised together with the Regional Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Pavilion and the Mediterranean Climate House Foundation, a meeting to assess the added-value of the WEFE approach and its impact on vulnerable local communities and their economic survival. Understanding the intertwined nature of water, energy, food, and ecosystems as means to climate adaptation and to build climate resilience presents a fresh endeavour for local authorities in the Mediterranean to tackle the impacts of climate change.

## Energy transition

### Tackling energy challenges for a greener future

A growing population of over 500 million inhabitants, coupled with intensive industrialisation and the growth of tourism, is putting pressure on energy resources in the Euro-Mediterranean region, and it is estimated that there will be a more than 60% rise in demand for energy in Southern Mediterranean countries alone by 2040. The UfM is committed to advancing a just energy transition in the region and made great strides towards achieving this goal in 2023 by advocating for renewable energy priorities, mobilising stakeholders, and facilitating impactful initiatives.

**It is estimated that there will be a more than 60% rise in demand for energy in Southern Mediterranean countries alone by 2040.**

The UfM made important progress with the implementation of the 2021 Ministerial Declaration on Energy and the 2022 Roadmap for Action on Energy. Key accomplishments in 2023 include **promoting sustainable recovery, establishing integrated energy and climate models, developing guidelines and targets for energy efficiency, and enhancing the business environment and investment climate.** These were achieved through events such as the annual meeting of the UfM Energy Platforms in May, where regional

stakeholders explored collaborative initiatives and discussions continued around the proposal for a Mediterranean grid code to enhance cooperation. Another key gathering in this context was the interim review meeting in November, where participants highlighted the need to improve investment in sustainable energy sources and foster public-private partnerships.

**The UfM undertook efforts to support local authorities in their energy transition as well as to promote capacity building and a stronger involvement of the private sector.** UfM representatives met with officials in Rabat in May to discuss Morocco's push for renewables, including green hydrogen. Furthermore, the 3<sup>rd</sup> UfM Energy and Climate Business Forum, organised in collaboration with the General Confederation of Moroccan Enterprises (CGEM), was held in the country a month later within the framework of MedCOP.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> UfM Energy and Climate Business Forum was a milestone in the promotion of the private sector's role in the energy transition. This strategic event served as a regional platform for energy and climate cooperation among countries on both sides of the Mediterranean, providing local authorities, private sector representatives, and civil society members with the opportunity

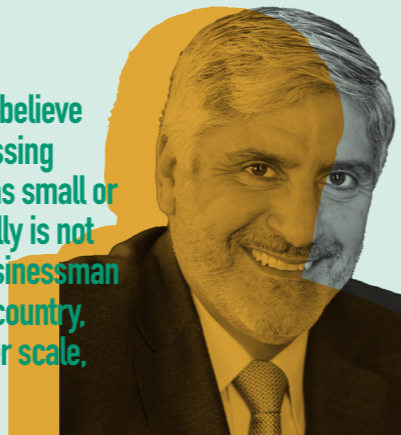
### Euro-Med success stories

## The wind of change: building a renewable energy industry in Jordan

Learn more about Samer Judeh's story!

Check out our video on the Tafila Wind Farm, a UfM-labelled project!

“When I look up, I still can't believe we did this. It is truly a blessing being part of an initiative, as small or large as it may be, that really is not just benefiting you as a businessman or a person, but also your country, your region and, on a larger scale, the world as a whole.”



Take a look at our 3<sup>rd</sup> UfM Energy and Climate Business Forum recap video!



to examine their actions and exchange best practices.

Sessions focused on clean energy, decarbonisation, and interconnections within the Mediterranean context. One of the main segments discussed **the role of women-led startups in the energy transition** and financial institutions, with participants sharing good practices to promote **gender-just climate and energy transition.**

The event also included a 2023 European Sustainable Energy Week (EU-SEW) panel on urgent energy issues in the Mediterranean, which highlighted the role of multilateral organisations such as the UfM in assisting countries on their quest for sustainable solutions, as well as two sessions on water management with Plan Bleu, one France's Regional Activity Centres of the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) of the

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). These touched upon the water-energy-food-ecosystem nexus approach and the blue economy, aiming to transform the Mediterranean marine and coastal areas into resources that sustain the local economy, create jobs, and build resilient territories.

In 2023, the UfM, with support from the European Commission, started **working on a proposal to establish a platform on clean tech and green hydrogen due to the need for comprehensive sustainable energy solutions.** This platform is set to facilitate collaboration among governments, industry stakeholders, and other key players to formulate a regional approach to the issue while complementing the existing UfM gas, renewable energy, and energy efficiency platforms.

## Urban transformation

### Youth innovativeness to advance the fight against climate change impacts in cities

The world is witnessing shifts in socio-cultural, physical, economic, political, and technological dynamics, with cities emerging as the primary arenas where these changes are reflected. The interaction of these dynamics is rapidly transforming not only cities but also the daily lives of city-dwellers, resulting in new urban spaces and new spatial practices.

In addition to dealing with these interactions, Mediterranean cities, which will be among the world's worst hit by climate change, will have to be planned and designed to face sea-level rise, droughts, water scarcity, overheating, and urban heat-island effects. However, given their specific cultural and morphological features, they will require ad hoc innovative solutions to adapt their built environments and urban heritage to the challenge of climate change.

This is why the UfM Secretariat, on the occasion of the Day of the Mediterranean 2023, launched a student competition on Urban Design entitled “Urban Solutions to Climate Change in the Mediterranean”. Open to undergraduate/graduate students of architecture, urban design, urban planning, or landscaping based in the 43 UfM Member States, **the competition aimed to tap into youth innovativeness and resourcefulness to tackle the significant climate-induced challenges the Mediterranean region already faces.**

Projects also had to showcase their overall contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

After reviewing around 80 submitted proposals from 12 UfM countries and from 37 different universities, three prizes were awarded, as well as the two winning mentions.





### Strengthening citizen engagement in building resilient and inclusive cities

With a view to promoting community and stakeholder engagement and enhancing the co-creation of shared visions for cities in the Mediterranean region, the UfM joined forces with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to organise a training course on Citizen Engagement in Urban Development, in the framework of the Shiraka Programme.

As an initiative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, this programme aims at contributing to political development in the MENA region, helping to achieve the objectives set in the UfM Strategic Urban Development Action Plan 2040, specifically - the promotion of “community and stakeholder engagement and co-creation of shared visions for the region”.

**According to recent studies, cities can avoid up to 20% of premature deaths with better urban and transport planning.**

Organised with the Hague Academy for Local Governance, on 8-12 May 2023, the training course inspired 17 participants from several UfM Member States including Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia, with innovative projects in good governance,

spatial justice, and resilient and inclusive cities.

**The training course gave participants the opportunity to explore a range of inclusive participatory urban design methods.** They were also able to apply various strategies using placemaking theory in participatory urban planning, and gain a better understanding of the importance of gender inclusion in urban planning processes. **The training course also explained how data-driven, evidence-based and open data strategies for citizen participation can be used to make cities more feminist and resilient,** and showed how participants could apply the lessons learned from the workshop in their own and other contexts.

Ultimately, the programme strengthened cross-border cooperation and coordination, and exchange of knowledge between local and national planning authorities.

### Reiterated political support for sustainable urban development in the Mediterranean area

2023 saw the organisation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> UfM Ministerial Conference on Sustainable Urban Development, which provided a key mandate to enhance cooperation through a new UfM Strategic Urban Development Action Plan 2040.

Held in Zagreb, Croatia, in May, the meeting reiterated UfM Ministers’ strong commitment to boosting sustainable, resilient, safe, and integrated urban development. They also highlighted the importance of the UfM Strategic Urban Development Action Plan 2040 as part of their commitment to achieving the SDGs, particularly through the UN New Urban Agenda.

In particular, they mandated the UfM to identify strategies to:

- improve urban health by promoting better planning, providing local



## Urban Agenda 2040 Action Plan

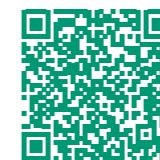
The UfM Urban Agenda and its Strategic Urban Development Action Plan 2040 provide a roadmap for addressing challenges of urban development around the Mediterranean and propose evidence-based, integrated and participatory education, focusing on the contextualisation of global policies such as the SDGs and the mutually reinforcing relationship between sustainable, fair, and inclusive urbanisation.



communities with social spaces and services, supporting climate action, and ensuring the sustainability of natural resources, and nature-based solutions;

- encourage joint work in sustainable port city transformation and port-city cooperation;
- promote public policies and programmes to tackle affordable housing;
- promote the valorisation and dissemination of vernacular architecture and traditional building skills, methodologies and materials as a means to increase cultural embeddedness and climate adaptation solutions;
- increase the safety of citizens and the resilience of cities in the face of natural and man-made disasters;
- reflect on coastal land planning governance models and instruments.

Read about the specific outcomes of the webinar series:



A progress report will be submitted before the end of the Decade of Action in 2030.

### Towards more liveable and healthy cities in the Euro-Mediterranean region

Building on their strong cooperation, the UfM and the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe organised a series of joint webinars on the health impacts of urban environments during 2023.

With over 1000 participants, these webinars brought together urban practitioners and decision-makers from several countries, cities and organisations, to provide an overview of both challenges and solutions to embed health and well-being in the planning and management of urban settings.

According to recent studies, cities can avoid up to 20% of premature deaths with better urban and transport planning.

It was with this in mind that in 2020, the WHO and the UfM signed a Memorandum of Understanding to collaborate across sectors in reinforcing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, notably in building capacity and promoting action for health, including through health research, health education and advocacy for health, in all policy domains of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

More specifically, an important area of collaboration is in supporting the implementation of SDG 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities – to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

While half of the world's population is in the process of becoming urban, in the countries bordering the Mediterranean, ...

2 out of 3 inhabitants are already city-dwellers. By 2030, 3/4 of the Mediterranean population will be urban

Source: UN

# Building bridges...

## Economic resilience: UfM's initiatives growth and trade in the Mediterranean

Sudden crises, conflicts and large-scale shocks can affect production processes and business organisations and constantly reshape the configuration of world trade. In this context, the economic and regional integration of the Euro-Mediterranean region holds untapped potential to combat global economic challenges. The UfM is committed to contributing to the integration of our region through its policy frameworks, dialogue platforms and projects.

Back in 2021, the first edition of the UfM Progress Report on Regional integration was published and, as a result, the UfM has been mobilising its ecosystem of partners and stakeholders to act upon the report's recommendations. A clear example is the UfM Conference on Regional Integration and Regional Value Chains, organised by the UfM and the German Development Cooperation in April 2023. This conference focused on two main themes: "Economic integration in times of crisis" and "What does a green transition mean for regional value chains?".

**The UfM is committed to contributing to the integration of our region through its policy frameworks, dialogue platforms and projects.**

Representatives of regional and international organisations, think tanks

*Human capital is one of the Mediterranean region's greatest assets. The UfM is dedicated to nurturing this capital and ensuring that the region is an area where people can reach their full potential and achieve their dreams. We do this by supporting initiatives that foster resilient and equitable value chains, enhance transport networks, promote private sector growth, and actively engage the region's youth and women as drivers of sustainable economic growth.*

NGOs, and of the business community discussed the need for better regulatory convergence within the region, the importance of engaging civil society and improving mobility between both shores of the Mediterranean, and the value of including gender and environmental values in regional policies.

Another example of the UfM's work to improve regional integration is the International Conference on Value Chains' Regionalisation, co-organised by the UfM Secretariat, Science Po Aix, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the French Ministry of Economics and Finance in June 2023. With leading political, diplomatic, economic and academic leading figures from both shores of the Mediterranean, the forum was the perfect occasion to examine current global economic and geopolitical reconfigurations and to valorise the benefits of regionalising international exchanges.

## Building connectivity for enhanced regional intergration

Transport is a vital pillar of sustainable development, present in eight out of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Transport is also a driver of economic development and an important component of regional integration in the Mediterranean. Consequently, in February 2023, the UfM hosted online the 2<sup>nd</sup> UfM Ministerial Conference on Transport. Ministers from the Member States reaffirmed their continued collective political support to developing a safe, secure, sustainable, efficient, and connected transport system. Participants also reiterated the importance of creating

an integrated multi-modal trans-Mediterranean transport network and the need to improve connectivity among Southern Mediterranean countries, between these countries and the EU and towards inner Africa and Asia.

Ministers recognised the work that has been carried out and acknowledged the progress achieved in fulfilling the cooperation objectives defined at the previous Ministerial Conference, held in 2013. There is a pressing need to ensure the resilience of sustainable transport systems to climate change, which will only be achieved by mobili-

sing available funds in a coordinated manner. Participants concluded by elaborating a Joint Declaration which comprises recommendations for greater regional transport cooperation in the following areas:

1. Maritime transport;
2. Land transport;
3. Air transport;
4. Connectivity network in the Mediterranean.

The creation of action plans, work programmes and ministerial declarations are crucial to set the objectives

## Regional Transport Action Plan (RTAP) for sustainable, smart, resilient and inclusive mobility

The RTAP will assist UfM countries in mitigating risks and identifying adaptation options to build future national transport policies, and to strengthen the region's capacity to elaborate evidence-based anticipatory policies. The action plan sets out a roadmap to put trans-Mediterranean transport on track for a sustainable, smart, resilient, and inclusive future. It defines short and mid-term priorities towards achieving the long-term goal of regional integration in the transport and mobility sector.

**The RTAP comprises 28 tangible actions that will guide, at the national and regional level, the UfM Member States' work in the transport sector until 2027.** Performance indicators set out targets and milestones to be achieved which, in turn, indicate the regional path towards a sustainable, smart, resilient, cleaner, and more inclusive mobility. These 28 actions are divided into:

- National transport strategies and policies;
- Trans-Mediterranean transport network, financing, logistics and multimodal transport;
- Maritime transport and commercial seaports;
- Land transport: road transport, urban mobility and rail transport;
- Civil aviation;
- Implementation and evaluation.

The RTAP was elaborated after **the UfM Working Groups launched a multistakeholder consultative process piloted by the UfM.** The document constitutes one of the key deliverables that was endorsed at the UfM Ministerial Conference on Transport.

**Discover the RTAP and its 28 tangible actions here:**





## Euro-Med success stories

### TransLogMed: Navigating new horizons and connecting continents

“ There is a lesson to be found in every challenge. It was interesting to see how one solution would work for a country but not for another, due to each country's unique environment.

TransLogMed works as a bridge between continents towards achieving more efficient and environmentally friendly transport solutions.



Delve deeper into Marta's journey here:



and future strategies for any sector. Additionally, regional platforms serve as frameworks of dialogue to exchange expertise and discuss the adoption of these documents. In the field of transport, UfM Ministers endorsed a new Regional Transport Action Plan that will reinvigorate multilateral cooperation in the sector until 2027, under the framework of the UfM Regional Platform on Transport Connectivity.

#### Bridging government and business for trade cooperation

Building bridges also involves bringing together government actors with the

private sector to promote greater cooperation between both. The UfM has been working towards this goal through various initiatives such as the UfM workshops on rules of origin, held in Tunis in October 2023 with the support of the German Development Cooperation. The main objective was to provide government and business actors with insights into rules of origin, and information on harmonised system codes that are relevant for trade agreements.

Attendees learned about the conceptual and legal aspects of rules of origin, with the aim to facilitate stakeholder consultations during trade negotiations. Moreover, **handbooks were developed, and practical coaching sessions were carried out to help both government and private sector participants in understanding and applying these rules effectively.**

Rules of origin are a critical aspect of international trade. Consequently, and due to their complexities and nuances, practical sessions and workshops are crucial for all actors involved. The UfM is committed to bridging the gaps between the public and the private sector, and will continue launching initiatives and workshops to simplify complex international trade processes.



What is it?

## Rules of Origin (RoO)

Rules of origin are the criteria needed to determine the national source of a product. Their importance is derived from the fact that duties and restrictions in several cases depend upon the source of imports.

There is wide variation in the practice of governments with regard to the rules of origin. In a globalizing world it has become even more important that a degree of harmonization is achieved in these practices of Members in implementing such a requirement.

Source: World Trade Organization

## ... Connecting people

### Fostering peer-learning through north-south engagement

The private sector is a key player in achieving sustainable and inclusive economic and human development. Connecting the business community with the public sector and with civil society remains one of the UfM's priority areas. Consequently, and with the aim of connecting the North and the South, the UfM organised, in December 2023, a study visit for public and private sector professionals from Southern Mediterranean countries to Swedish companies. The UfM had the support of the German Development Cooperation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden and Sida.

**wide range of Swedish stakeholders who highlighted their experience with trade and development aid, government support policies, advocacy practices, the innovation ecosystem and access to market and finance.** On the last day of the trip, the participants visited the University of Uppsala, where they gained deeper insights on the city's innovation-driven ecosystem: from promoting entrepreneurship among students and incubation, to funding options and ongoing collaboration between researchers and companies. **Field trips of this kind have proven essential to get a more holistic understanding of existing partnerships among stakeholders.**

### Empowering employment through dialogue

The UfM also works to connect representatives from ministries and agencies of the UfM Member States with representatives from European institutions/agencies and international organisations. As part of the Roadmap 2022-2025 for the Implementation of the 5<sup>th</sup> UfM Ministerial Declaration on Employment and Labour, a meeting of the UfM Regional Platform on Employment and Labour took place in December 2023 with the participation of multiple stakeholders.

## These study visits permit participants to immerse themselves in the country's entrepreneurial ecosystem, learn, share best practices and network.

The participants in these study visits immersed themselves in the country's entrepreneurial ecosystem, while networking, learning, and sharing best practices. **The participants from Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia interacted with a**

The main aim of regional platforms is to foster a close interaction between national experts and stakeholders, allowing them to exchange on ministerial mandates, better understand needs, share experience, identify best practices, and promote concrete coo-

Take a look at the recap video from the 5<sup>th</sup> UfM Trade Forum!



operation projects. In this case, several sessions were dedicated to priority themes, including youth employment, and the perspectives of the Mediterranean Network of Second Chance Schools (MedNC) were presented. Field visits were also organised, and participants reflected on these during the second day of the meeting. Attendees had the chance to discuss and share their perspectives on the implementation of the Marrakesh Ministerial Declaration.

Global economic, political, and humanitarian disruptions pose serious challenges that call for regionally coordinated, sustainable, and inclusive responses. In this context, the UfM Regional Platform on Trade and Investment organised, together with the German Development Cooperation, the 2023 UfM Trade and Investment Forum. This represents the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the Forum in five successive years, which reaffirms the UfM's commitment to facilitating trade and promoting investment to foster economic development and integration in the Mediterranean.

During the Forum, the European Commission and EU Member States presented the regional Team Europe Initiative "Jobs through Trade and Investment in the Southern Neighbourhood". The discussions were guided by the three main priorities from the initiative: sustainable trade and investment, vocational training and skills, and inclusive entrepreneurship.

Attendees, including high-level speakers, partners, and stakeholders from the private and the public sector, had the opportunity to discuss current regional economic dynamics in a changing global context. Furthermore, the recommendations from the UfM Trade and Investment Forum will feed into preparations for the next UfM Ministerial on Trade.

### Skills development for the Mediterranean's economic growth and inclusion

Focusing on the second pillar of the Team Europe Initiative on "Jobs through Trade and Investment", "Skills and Vocational Education and Training", the Union for the Mediterranean Co-Presidency organised the UfM High-Level Meeting on Skills in the Mediterranean in Madrid on 12 July 2023. **This was the perfect occasion to acknowledge the importance of skills in leveraging youth potential for innovation and digitalisation, and for contributing to economic growth and further social inclusion.**

Skilling, upskilling and reskilling boost employability, inclusiveness, competitiveness, and growth, making it possible to better address the challenges of technological and non-technological transformations such as the green transition, demographic change, and digitalisation of the economy in the region. With these principles in mind, the meeting brought together a broad spectrum of partners and stakeholders involved at different levels in the skills and training sector to exchange insights, experiences, and best practices. The Ministerial Declaration of Marrakesh 2022 also served as a basis to set the key priorities of the meeting:

1. Investing and diversification of skills to open the door to more lifelong learning opportunities;
2. Supporting transitions – demographic, green, and digital;
3. Anticipating the future of work.



## Team Europe Initiatives

Source: south.euneighbours.eu

Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs) are initiatives where the EU, EU Member States, their development agencies, and financial institutions, together with the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) join forces in the pursuit of key policy objectives. The purpose of such a coordinated and collective process is to promote initiatives with a maximum transformative impact in partner countries, both at regional and country level.

This High-Level Meeting connected several UfM Ministers and Secretaries of State from both shores of the Mediterranean with cooperation actors and young entrepreneurs, who could share

Southern Mediterranean, which took place in Madrid on the same dates.

### Building a bridge between Mediterranean youth and the labour market

Youth unemployment remains one of the most pressing challenges in the Mediterranean region, so the UfM continues to work through different means to promote youth inclusion. Young experts and entrepreneurs met with UfM government representatives at the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the UfM Community of Practice on Youth Employment in the Southern Mediterranean. The event, organised with the support of the German Development Cooperation and the European Commission, included presentations, exchanges of best practices, breakout sessions and practical workshops, all aimed at encouraging dialogue and cooperation between different actors in the field of youth employment.

The CoP provided a forum for fruitful discussions around decent job creation, quality education systems, skills training, and employability. The event can be considered a role model of cross-sectorial cooperation within the Union for the Mediterranean. As such, its focused panel discussions were dedicated to promoting cooperation between the private sector, the public sector and academia, with the objective of bridging the skills gap and addressing the gender-based inequalities young women face when they enter the labour market.

The UfM Secretariat also partnered with the German Development Cooperation to host the UfM Conference on Youth Employment and the Future of Work. The conference, held in Tirana in June 2023, further exemplifies

## The Community of Practice provided the space for fruitful discussions around decent job creation, quality education systems, training skills and employability.

Take a look at the CoP recap video!



their experience and insights on the skill-related opportunities and challenges that persist in our region. The UfM reaffirmed its commitment to acting as a bridge between states, peoples, and sectors, including in the employment sphere. The meeting took place back-to-back with the 4<sup>th</sup> UfM Community of Practice on Youth Employment in the



Check out the **Future of Work** recap:



cross-sectorial cooperation within the organisation. A focus was made on youth-led organisations and networks, national and regional youth support programmes, and entrepreneurial skills for the future.

Among the key messages expressed by the panellists were the need to invest in an ecosystem that makes it easier for innovative startups to emerge, and the importance of tackling the triple challenge cited by most of these startups: the need for funding, know-how, and networking. **The young voices that participated in the event identified various priorities that governments and institutions need to address**, including:

- More efficient measures to facilitate mobility within the UfM, with better coordination;

- Bridging the gender gap in skills development, access to labour markets and entrepreneurship opportunities;
- Promotion of diversity as an added value;
- Regional stability and peace, which requires strong communities and empowered youth;
- Tackling brain-drain in the region, particularly in the Western Balkans and the MENA region.

Mediterranean youth are considered actors of change, the future of our region. Nonetheless, in a constantly changing economic context, they need training in green, blue, and digital skills as well as favourable economic and employment environments to develop their capabilities and put their innovative ideas into practice.

**Mediterranean youth are considered actors of change, the future of our region. Nonetheless, in a constantly changing economic context, they need training in green, blue, and digital skills as well as favouring economic and employment environments to develop their capabilities and put their innovative ideas into practice.**



## Social inclusiveness and equality as an essential element in the socio-economic development of the region

# Inclusive and just societies

*Within the socio-economic fabric of the Mediterranean region, social inclusion and equality emerge as fundamental pillars for sustainable development. The UfM facilitates the creation of inclusive societies in the region by engaging with civil society, promoting robust social dialogue, and supporting actions that advocate for the full participation of women, youth, and people with disabilities. Through these concerted efforts, we aim to cultivate resilient communities and advance collective prosperity across the Mediterranean.*

Follow this link to watch a **video recap** of the event!



### Fostering social dialogue for better governance and development in the Mediterranean

Social dialogue is a mechanism that civil society actors can use to influence economic and social policy. **Through exchanges, negotiations, and consultations, consensus and democratic involvement can be achieved and, consequently, institutions can ensure better governance.** Intergovernmental organisations such as the UfM are key

social dialogue, the UfM Social Dialogue Forum has been held every three years since 2010. The fifth edition was held in November 2023 in Marseille by the European Commission's Directorate-for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion of the European Commission (DG EMPL) on behalf of the UfM Co-Presidency.

### Intergovernmental organisations such as the UfM appear as key actors that can provide spaces for social dialogue between various sectors and stakeholders.

actors that can provide spaces for social dialogue between various sectors and stakeholders.

To contribute to the development of a strong, independent, and effective

Representatives from employers' and workers' organisations from UfM countries, social partner organisations, and representatives from the UfM and the EU participated in sessions that tackled: 1) practice of social dialogue, 2) the green and digital transitions, 3) active inclusion and effective social protection, 4) economic migration and brain drain and 5) regional programming.

## Women

Current data highlights that, compared to the global average, Europe and the MENA region are below the 6,2% global percentage of women entrepreneurs who own a business (5.3% and 4.5% respectively). This low rate is explained by the difficulties in accessing business support services and networks. In light of this reality, the UfM has put at the heart of its priorities women economic empowerment in 2023.

### Enhancing the pivotal role of women entrepreneurs in Industry 4.0

Industry 4.0 technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Blockchain, and the Internet of Things (IoT) are unleashing a new era of economic disruption. Although they have the potential to promote sustainable growth, insufficient digital access, skills, and finance are still significant hurdles for women entrepreneurs.

The UfM and the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) joined forces to host the 7<sup>th</sup> Women Business Forum, which focused on the role of women in industry and innovation. Taking place in Tunis over two days in October, the annual event provided participants with a unique opportunity to learn from and exchange knowledge with leading private sector professionals as well as high-level public officials.

**It provided 40 female entrepreneurs from across the MENA region with a platform to discuss the evolution of fintech, the management of fintech start-ups, risks, regulations, ethics, governance, and a regional action plan on gender-lens in the sector.**

The event included round table sessions on digitalisation skills and AI for sustainable growth as well as on women entrepreneurs in the digital age. It also provided attendees with the opportunity to learn about the UfM-supported UNIDO Promoting Women's Empowerment II project's achievements



What is it?

## Financial technology (fintech)

Fintech, or financial technology, refers to any app, software or technology that is used to deliver enhanced banking and financial services.

This encompasses services including cashless payments, peer-to-peer (P2P) lending platforms, robotic trading, robo-advice, crowdfunding, and virtual currencies.

Enhancing the role of women in the sector is seen as key to fostering widespread and inclusive growth in the region.

and hear first-hand accounts from its beneficiaries.

### Breaking down gender barriers in Fintech

The UfM hosted a webinar titled "Women in Fintech: Bridging the Gender Gap" in November with support from German Corporation for International Cooperation. It provided 40 female entrepreneurs from across the MENA region with a platform to discuss the evolution of fintech, the management of fintech start-ups, risks, regulations, ethics, governance, and a regional action plan on applying a gender lens in the sector.

A technical training session led by Dr Amira Khaddour, a professor at the Ecole Nationale des Sciences et Technologies Avancées in Borj Cédria, Tunisia, and a member of the executive board of African Women in Fintech, explored intersectionality in the sector through interactive elements such as quizzes, videos, and participants' questions. Participants exchanged views on the global financial scenario, emphasising the role of diversity and inclusivity in propelling economic development.

The economic benefits of active female participation in fintech were substantiated with data, and the need for diverse boards in fintech startups was underscored. Crowdfunding emerged as a pivotal tool to bridge the financing gap for women founders, especially in the early stages of startup development. Participants also analysed the relation between non-fungible tokens (NFTs) and blockchain technology, and highlighted the need for a robust banking sector regulatory framework to ensure transparency, accountability, and adherence to rules.

**Online attendees agreed that the main challenges they face include knowledge gaps, a lack of mentorship opportunities, and unhealthy work-life balances, in addition to gender**

Take a look at the event report for more information



Check out our Women Business Forum teaser video!



**biases, limited financial literacy, and restricted access to funding.**

### Empowering female entrepreneurs through minimum viable product development

The UfM hosted a webinar on minimum viable product (MVP) in July 2023 to help businesswomen develop the simplest version of products that can be used by early customers who then provide constructive feedback and suggest improvements.

Co-organised by the Brussels-based Womenpreneur-Initiative women's organisation with support from the German Development Cooperation, the session delved into the fundamentals of MVP development, including the feedback loop approach, alternatives to the MVP approach, problem-solving strategies, different metrics, and the double diamond thinking process.

**Promoting female entrepreneurship in this sector is central to fostering equitable growth in a region where only 5% of businesses are led by women, well below the global average of 23% to 26%.**

The workshop's participants, who ranged from female entrepreneurs to product managers and designers interested in lean product development and agile methodologies, were able to work collaboratively in cross-functional teams and test their own MVPs on real users. **The webinar's highly interactive and hands-on format provided them with practical tools and techniques that are directly applicable to their product development projects and served as an opportunity for them to improve their professional skills.**

### Promoting entrepreneurship and inclusion of women

The social economy, which is characterised by solidarity and prioritises people over capital, is experiencing heightened recognition as a driver of social cohesion, job creation, and inclusive growth in line with the SDGs. It is high on the UfM agenda, featuring heavily in the May 2022 Ministerial Declaration emanating from the UfM Ministerial on Employment and Labour, and is in line with the EU Social Economy Action Plan providing a framework to further support the development of the social economy until 2030.

Over 80 social economy actors and entrepreneurs gathered in Barcelona in October to participate in the fourth edition of the UfM Social Economy Conference. Organised alongside the Spanish Confederation of Social Economy Entrepreneurs (CEPES) and co-sponsored by the German Development Cooperation and the European Union (EU), the event focused on two interrelated themes: **the promotion of social entrepreneurship and the participation of women in the social economy.**

The UfM Social Economy Conference brought together a broad range of sectoral partners and stakeholders to exchange insights and experience in the field, with a view to addressing current opportunities and challenges. Attendees discussed best practices with the aim of unleashing the full potential of social economy entrepreneurship and facilitating the active engagement of women. Recommendations from the conference will serve to guide future actions on promoting this sector across the Euro-Mediterranean region.

### Tapping into the potential of women in the water sector in the Mediterranean

The role of women in the water sector is paramount and should be ensured across the Euro-Mediterranean region. The UfM marked International



Discover **GWP-Med** study here:



Women's Day 2023 by highlighting the importance of this, declaring it key to achieving the SDGs.

The UfM, together with a multi-stakeholder coalition including Member State, UN agencies, international and regional organisations, NGOs, private sector bodies and civil society, joined UNESCO's World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP) Call for Action (CfA) in 2021 to accelerate gender equality in the water domain. Two years later, it helped co-organise the 'Supporting gender equality in the Water Action Agenda with Global Multi-stake-

**between policy and practice, prioritising the collection of sex-disaggregated water data, and counter-fighting norms and stereotypes that disadvantage women and girls.**

The UfM also highlighted the GWP-MED publication on Empowering Women in Water Diplomacy in the Middle East and North Africa, which aims to increase the number of women in water diplomacy decision-making positions due to their role in peace building and identifying capacity-building needs. Both the publication and the Call for Action have the potential to raise the voice of women and to engage them more actively in the sector. This not only advances the achievement of the SDGs but also helps to ensure fair and sound water governance.

#### Integrating gender equality approaches in Higher Education

The UfM Secretariat organised a workshop on Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) in Higher Education institutions and STEM in December 2023. Over 100 people took part in the session,

including representatives from the UfM's Jordanian Co-presidency, the EU Commission, and academics from France, Spain, Greece, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and Tunisia, as well as entrepreneurs with a background in engineering, AI, and robotics.

Speakers shared their views on the challenges and opportunities associated with developing, implementing, and monitoring GEPs in the sector. Sessions focused on the importance of GEPs in universities, emphasising their pivotal role in securing funding and fostering inclusivity in academia. They also facilitated dialogue on developing

## A minimum viable product (MVP) aims at validating assumptions and hypotheses about the product's value proposition, market fit, and feasibility while minimizing resources and time invested.

holder effort' side-event at the 2023 UN Water Conference within the framework of International Women's Day activities.

The UfM paid tribute to initiatives such as the Call for Action, which urges decision-makers, political leaders, governors, policymakers, financiers, CEOs and other relevant actors to accelerate concrete actions towards achieving water access for all without discrimination. It also seeks to **promote women's leadership in water management and governance, protect women's water rights and apply gender-equal financing, while narrowing the gender gap**

effective GEPs and tailoring them to the Mediterranean context. Although GEPs can help empower women in academic environments by promoting equal access to education, leadership opportunities, research funding, and career progression, obstacles persist, and attendees emphasised the need to develop a gender-sensitive approach to early education.

The workshop also touched upon ongoing efforts to address gender disparities and **provided participants with an opportunity to discuss initiatives that aim to eliminate stereotypes through activities in schools as well**

**as comprehensive programmes that promote women in STEM.**

Participants' recommendations included considerations regarding work-life balance, gender equality in leadership and recruitment, the integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content, and measures against gender-based violence. Difficulty garnering political support and efforts to combat gender discrimination were discussed as well, with panellists stressing that GEPs can have a ripple effect on society by breaking down traditional gender roles and norms.

## Youth

### Youth empowerment for a sustainable and inclusive Mediterranean

Approximately a third of Euro-Mediterranean citizens are under the age of 24, a population that faces obstacles ranging from environmental crises to high

unemployment rates, gender inequality, and insufficient political representation. However, when empowered to actively contribute as citizens, young people have the potential to find solutions to current and future challenges. Therefore, empowering the region's youth as catalysts for positive change remains a UfM top priority, as

evidenced in initiatives such as the UfM Youth Strategy 2030, adopted in 2021.

In November 2023, the UfM Secretariat hosted the third edition of the **Mediterranean Youth Academy (MYA)**, back-to-back with the UfM annual event on Youth, held this time under the thematic "Youth Engagement for a Sustainable and Inclusive Medite-

rranean". This initiative was organised in collaboration with the Mediterranean Youth Academy, the **Anna Lindh Foundation, the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), Casa Mediterraneo** and sponsored by the **German Development Cooperation**. More than 90 young people from over 15 Euro-Mediterranean countries participated in panels and non-formal education workshops focused on three main priority areas:

- Youth and climate action
- Youth and employment
- Youth engagement and social inclusion

The participants had the chance to put forward recommendations and calls for action in the presence of global leaders and international and civil society organisations, representing an excellent opportunity for Euro-Mediterranean young people to propose youth-related initiatives from a bottom-up perspective and be involved in policy-making processes as relevant changemakers.

The event saw, in this context, the launch of the **UfM Youth Agenda: Call for Action**, a set of proposals and recommendations to operationalize the



Watch the recap video of the event:



## UfM Youth Agenda: Call for Action

The UfM Youth Agenda is a call for action and a blueprint for collaboration. It includes a comprehensive set of initiatives and recommendations aimed at reinforcing the role of youth in developing the MENA region, while combating major global challenges. This document also serves as an advocacy paper to mobilise resources and generate greater political interest.



The agenda is structured around 3 priority areas and 12 actionable steps.

Get deeper insights on the UfM Youth Agenda and its main priorities here:



### Priority area 1

Environment and climate action; digital and green revolutions can allow young people to become actors of change.

### Priority area 2

Education and employment; investing in young talent and their initiatives contributes to inclusive and sustainable growth.

### Priority area 3

Social inclusion and participation; current global challenges require a cross-sectorial and inter-generational approach.

UfM Youth Strategy and reinforce the role of young people in tackling major regional challenges by 2030.

### Connecting education and employment: UfM-EIB collaboration for youth empowerment

One of the main priorities within the UfM Youth Agenda is the education and training of young people. Poor quality education, high dropout rates, skill mismatches with the labour market and inequalities when accessing higher education have been identified as the main challenges that hinder youth employment and development. Consequently, the UfM Secretariat partners regularly with other institutions to contribute to youth education and empowerment. Throughout 2023, collaboration with

the European Investment Bank (EIB) has made it possible to provide training in Moroccan, Egyptian and Jordanian universities. This initiative was a continuation of the pilot sessions hosted in November 2022 in the Euro-Mediterranean University of Fez, a flagship UfM-labelled project.

The objective is to bring training tailored to the needs of the receiving universities in fields related to the UfM policy frameworks, the EIB role within the European Union, and EU financing mechanisms. **The interconnectedness of the region mixed with the ever-changing needs of the private sector make it essential for the Mediterranean youth to develop innovative and interdisciplinary skills.**

## People with disabilities

### Towards inclusive policies: UfM's initiatives for disability rights in the region

People with disabilities are among the most marginalised and excluded groups in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and has highlighted the need for urgent action to ensure their full inclusion. However, the socioeconomic, cultural, and political heterogeneity of the region contributes to a diversity of approaches to disability policies, hindering opportunities for regional cooperation. In this context, **the UfM Secretariat is a crucial actor, able to set-up a dialogue platform between national governments and stakeholders to agree on a regional agenda on disability.**

The UfM is determined to increase its scope of action in this area, where extending the network of involvement and collaboration is fundamental. After signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the League of Arab States in 2022, the UfM's Secretary General attended a high-level event "The Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Multidimensional Poverty", organised in January 2023 by the Arab League at the initiative of

the Ministry of Social Development and Family of the State of Qatar. These initial meetings are part of the UfM Secretariat's goal to pave the way and contribute to the agenda of the second edition of the EuroMed Conference on Disability in January 2024. Additionally, the UfM Secretariat's ongoing collaboration with the Arab League and the ONCE Foundation has made it possible to carry out the **"First situational assessment of the social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities in the Euro-Mediterranean region"**, published in October 2023.

The purpose of the report is to identify the status of social and economic inclusion of people with disabilities, the obstacles to their full and meaningful inclusion in society, and the opportunities available to achieve the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD, or CRPD). The assessment is intended to guide the UfM Secretariat and the Spanish ONCE Social Group in defining the guiding principles, priorities, objectives, and functioning of a future Euro-Mediterranean Platform on the Rights

Hawkar, a car for people with disabilities.





of Persons with Disabilities, with the goal to address the underlying causes of discrimination and set the preconditions for more inclusive policies and programmes in the longer term.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Euro-Mediterranean Conference on the Socioeconomic Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities presents an

exceptional opportunity to discuss, among diverse stakeholders, the launch of a Euro-Mediterranean Agenda by the end of 2024. Through regional dialogue and cooperation, the UfM Secretariat aims at generating the necessary knowledge and interest to foster more inclusive and comprehensive policies.

**Euro-Med success stories**

## Khadija Jallouli: Revolutionising Mobility for All

**Keep reading about Hawkar and Khadija's journey:**



**Learn more about Hawkar in video:**



Khadija Jallouli is the co-founder and CEO of Hawkar, a Tunisian startup that is making waves with its innovative electric vehicle designed for individuals with disabilities. With a diverse and inclusive team, Hawkar aims at ensuring equal access to transportation regardless of one's physical abilities. Khadija Jallouli participated in the initiative MENA Women Business Club, jointly launched by the UfM Secretariat and the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO).

Khadija's vision to create an electric vehicle for individuals with disabilities can become a catalyst for change, inspiring others to envision a future where mobility knows no bounds.



# Learning, building capacities...

*In the evolving socio-economic landscape of the Mediterranean region, digital transformation emerges as cornerstone in fostering inclusive growth by advocating for the digitalisation of regional economies. By promoting digital innovation and access, the UfM seeks to bridge economic disparities, empower marginalised communities, and unlock vast potential for collective prosperity across the Mediterranean.*



### Do you remember?

Since the adoption of its 2017 Roadmap for Action, the UfM has been actively engaged in promoting digital connectivity, skills, and innovation. In the spirit of fostering collaboration, building bridges, and learning from each other across the Mediterranean region, the UfM Secretariat sought the support of a digital transformation champion among its members: Estonia. In 2019, the 1<sup>st</sup> UfM Con-

ference on Digital Transformation and Digital Skills for the Future took place in Tallinn, setting the scene for all UfM activities in this sector.

**Read more about it:**



## Learning

### Fostering game-changing digital transformation in the Euro-Mediterranean region

Digital transformation is a game-changer not only for individual economies, but also for the region as a whole, as it can make a significant contribution to attaining the Sustainable Development Goals, as a vehicle for the creation of more decent jobs and economic growth.

Building on that, in 2023, the UfM partnered with the German Development Cooperation and the AfricaMed Business Forum to hold the annual UfM Conference on Digital Transformation, this time focused on **the role of digital transformation in promoting the green transition and developing digital ecosystems in the UfM region.**

Held in Tangiers, Morocco, the event gave participants the chance to exchange insights and best practices on current opportunities and challenges to unleashing the full potential of digi-

talisation in the region. Representatives from Albania, Bosnia, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, Morocco, and Spain shared their experience.

Success stories showcased at the conference included implementation of e-medical prescription agreements between Estonia and seven EU countries, greening of the LUMI Supercomputer in Finland, expansion of Glovo into 25 countries (including 7 African countries), modernisation of data accreditation in Albania, using smart technology to improve road safety in Morocco, guidance provided by the EU Digital Agenda for Western Balkans, as well as the "Pathfinder" toolkit from The Switchers.org.

The UfM has subsequently organised several technical training sessions on digitalisation and e-governance in the Southern Mediterranean to promote these fields.

*Our partners at the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) explored the potential of digitalisation for the green transition in the Mediterranean in their 2023 Yearbook. Read more on insights and trends for the future:*



## Capacity building

### Walking the talk: implementing the conferences' results across the region

Building on the conclusions of the Digital Transformation conferences, the UfM is organising national workshops in the Southern Mediterranean countries to support their digital transition. Following Algeria, Palestine and Mauritania in 2021, it was the turn of Egypt and Morocco in 2023 to host the UfM National Workshops on Digital Transformation.

In partnership with the Estonian ICT Cluster and the relevant Ministries (the Egyptian Ministry of Communications and Information Technology and the Moroccan Ministry of Digital Transition and Administrative Reform), the workshops brought together over 60 experts and participants to explore how to enhance the digital transformation, notably through an exchange of best practices and ideas based on the experiences of Estonia.

The workshops focused on an enabling national strategy and legal framework, public-private partnerships, an open innovation ecosystem, and digital skills, while examples of digital public services (e-taxation, e-justice, social protection, etc.), digital identity, interoperability and data security were also examined.

## Harnessing the power of digitalisation

### Employment

The Euro-Mediterranean region has enormous human capital, yet the proportion of young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEETs) remains structurally high, especially in Southern Europe and the MENA region.

With that in mind, the UfM Secretariat co-organised two activities in Turin, a

workshop on the platform economy together with the German Development Cooperation and the European Training Foundation, as well as the 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the UfM Community of Practice on Youth Employment in the Southern Mediterranean, both focused on digitalisation.

Participants visited Talent Garden, an organisation that promotes learning and networking opportunities in the digital ecosystem, and- Officine Grandi Riparazioni (OGR), a centre for contemporary culture, innovation and business acceleration.

An "ideathon" was conducted with the aim of identifying initiatives and prac-

tices related to green and digital skills to be presented at the closing event of the European Year of Skills in May 2024. The participants converged on the need for a sound gap analysis, awareness raising, incentives for change, just transition, a focus on local and rural levels, inclusiveness, intrapreneurship, and linking education and community-based activities.

### Sustainable investments

The UfM Secretariat joined forces with ANIMA Investment Network to explore the possibility of aligning investments with sustainability and corporate responsibility goals, and the role of digitalising impact measurement. The event brought together a delegation of 74 representatives from public institutions, the private sector, business support organisations, investment promotion agencies, international financing and development institutions, as well as think tanks and research centres to discuss climate challenges and the role of innovative solutions to promote sustainable development in the region. The online tool IMPACT RATING, developed by ANIMA Investment Network with the support of the UfM and the European Union, was presented as a valuable resource for assessing the impact of investment projects.

**The seminar yielded positive outcomes, highlighting regulations that encourage businesses to engage in sustainable development, both at the European level and in the countries of the Southern Mediterranean.** The strategies implemented by the private sector and public organisations in this field were shared, along with a commitment to define a Euro-Mediterranean joint strategy. The commitments made by countries since the Paris Agreement on climate change and emerging international standards in social responsibility have prompted business and investment organisations to adopt tools for monitoring the impact of investment projects.



### What is it?

## Impact rating

Impact rating is a rating tool making it possible to engage companies in achieving more positive impacts for their territories. Created and developed by ANIMA, IMPACT RATING targets all organisations that support companies and wish to encourage them to develop their social responsibility and increase their contribution to sustainable development. It assesses

the performance and impact of a company or an investment project in economic, social, environmental, and territorial terms, based on a questionnaire on the company's practices. The tool is aligned with international initiatives and makes it possible to assess a company's contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals - SDGs.



# Water

The Mediterranean region has unique water management challenges, which are mainly due to its geographical, climate, and socio-economic diversity. More than 180 million people experience water poverty in the Mediterranean, while an additional 60 million face water stress to a certain degree.

With the ever-increasing demand for water combined with the need for sustainable water management, digital transformation has emerged as a transformative force in the sector. Digital solutions and innovation are also needed to ensure sustainable and cost-efficient water management that can tackle challenges such as climate change, pollution and the depletion of water resources.

In this line, the UfM Secretariat organised, in 2023, the **1st Conference on Digital Transformation of the Water Sector in the Mediterranean**. It served as a valuable platform for stakehol-

ders to exchange knowledge, share experiences, and explore innovative solutions for water institutions and utility service providers in the region. **This conference also paved the way towards a Roadmap for Digitalisation of the Water Sector in the Euro-Mediterranean Region, as UfM Member States deem it essential to formulate effective strategies to achieve Sustainable Development Goals and address pressing water-related issues in the region.**

As was touched upon in this conference, digital water technologies have the potential to improve water resource management, enhance decision-making and increase energy efficiency. Furthermore, digital solutions enable the integration of renewable energy sources into water treatment and distribution processes, reducing carbon emissions and improving the overall sustainability of the sector.

## Euro-Med success stories

### InstaDeep, when Artificial Intelligence and creativity meet

“The most important thing is to give women the confidence that they can do it. I mentor a lot of start-ups. I always tell them you can do this if you put your head to ignore what everyone else is telling you. I came from a traditional background that wanted me to be a lawyer, engineer, doctor.

Zohra Slim is the co-founder and Chief Web Officer of InstaDeep, an enterprise specialising in artificial intelligence.



Read more about her story:



# Gender equality

In line with the theme chosen for UN International Women’s Day on 8 March 2023, “DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality”, the UfM held a webinar on Innovation and Technological Change for Gender Equality: Cracking the Code to Equity.

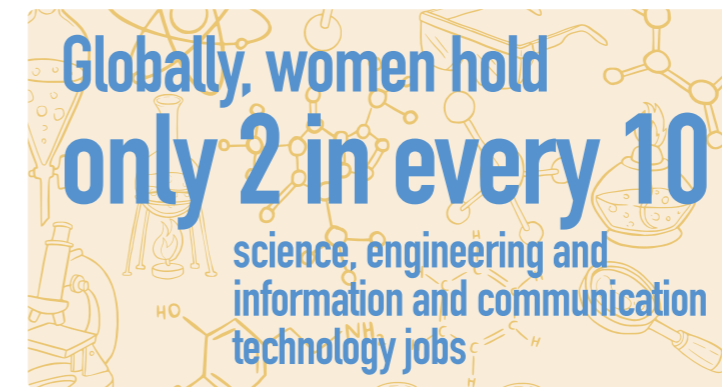
Successful women entrepreneurs working in the field of digital platforms, AI, and tech in the MENA region (Algeria, Egypt, and Tunisia), together with institutional representatives, shared good practices and discussed solutions for an inclusive digital ecosystem.

In particular, panellists shared their experience and recommendations with almost 100 online attendees on how to

ensure that no one is left behind; on how to create a gender-transformative innovation ecosystem; and on how to ensure that technology and innovation are inclusive, accessible, and responds to the needs of women and girls.

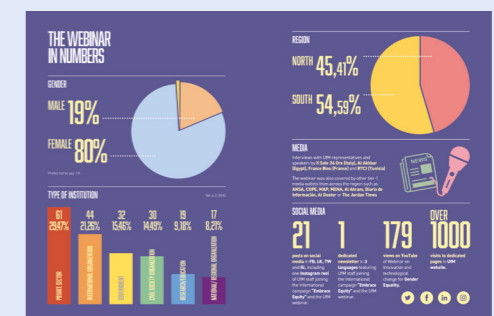
Finally, the webinar also offered an opportunity to present the results of surveys carried out as part of the “Promoting Women Empowerment for inclusive and sustainable industrial development in the MENA region” (PWE) project on access to and use of ICT and digital technologies by female entrepreneurs in the manufacturing sector and manufacturing-related services in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, and Tunisia. The surveys show that the opportunities offered by digital technologies are only partially exploited.

The webinar was a concrete step towards the commitment taken in Madrid in October 2022 by **UfM Member States to promote inclusive leadership models for women from early education, in all fields, including science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).**



## International Women’s Day: Innovation and technological change for Gender Equality

Narrowing the gender gap in digital skills could help narrow the gender wage gap by providing access for women to higher skilled ICT-related roles. Want to learn more about this crucial topic?



Discover our newest publication:



# Collaboration as a key tool to protect our region



What is it?

Source: pprdmed.eu

## The PPRD-Med Programme

The Prevention, Preparedness and Response to natural and man-made Disasters (PPRD) Mediterranean programme aspires to increase resilience to natural and man-made disasters in the Southern Neighbourhood countries and the Mediterranean region by reinforcing cooperation and partnerships between the EU and Mediterranean countries. The key objectives of the initiative are:

- **Enhancing Resilience:** By fostering a culture of preparedness and proactive risk reduction;
- **Promoting Cooperation** and recognising the interconnectedness of natural and man-made disasters;
- **Capacity Building:** Through training programmes, workshops, and technical assistance;
- **Policy Alignment:** to facilitate cross-border coordination and ensure a cohesive regional approach;
- **Public Awareness:** Focusing on the grass-roots level to empower individuals and communities to take an active role.

The programme is funded by the European Commission's Directorate General of European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO). Learn more about the programme and its partners:



*In the Mediterranean region, characterised by heightened vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, robust civil protection measures are imperative. The UfM champions initiatives aimed at bolstering resilience, enhancing capacity, and fostering cooperation to fortify civil protection in the region. Through collaborative efforts, we endeavour to mitigate risks, safeguard livelihoods, and foster protection and preparedness.*

### Strengthening Mediterranean resilience: Regional disaster management cooperation

The summer of 2023 was marked by devastating disasters across the Euro-Mediterranean region. From fires in Greece and Portugal, to flooding in Libya, Italy and Algeria, a persistent drought in Spain and an earthquake in Morocco and Türkiye, these events highlight the need for coordinated responses. During the year, neighbouring countries provided aid and assistance to optimise resources and ensure that no one was left behind. Nonetheless, the increasing complexity of natural and man-made disasters, often exacerbated by climate change, requires partnerships and collaboration to improve regional civil protection.

The UfM Secretariat's commitment to reinforcing regional cooperation and increasing resilience in the region is reflected in the "Prevention, Preparedness and Response to natural and man-made Disasters" (PPRD) Mediterranean programme, launched in June 2023 in Rome. **PPRD-Med focuses on improving the sustainable capacities of Mediterranean civil protection institutions to prevent, prepare for and respond to disasters at sub-regional and regional level.** The programme strengthens cooperation between all relevant governmental actors, civil society, and other stakeholders. In addition, another initiative was set in motion on the same day: a multi-country study to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the disaster risk landscape and capacity to respond, with a budget of €2.4 million.

### Building a Mediterranean Civil Protection Framework

Regional dialogue platforms continue to be one of the main pillars of the UfM Secretariat's work; they are a fundamental tool to share experiences, identify best practices and promote concrete cooperation projects. For instance, the launch of PPRD Med was followed by the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the UfM Civil Protection Regional Dialogue Platform. This conference brought together UfM Member States, international organisations, and stakeholders from the Euro-Mediterranean region to discuss the development of civil protection cooperation throughout the whole Mediterranean area.

The Civil Protection Platform paved the way for a meeting of UfM Directors-General on Civil Protection, held in Valencia in October 2023. In this meeting, the participants discussed the contents of a 2030 UfM Action Plan on Civil Protection, which intends to encourage Member States to work together towards a common Mediterranean Framework on Civil Protection. **These platforms and action plans are crucial to develop a culture of risk awareness, foster response preparedness, promote effective international disaster assistance and to enhance inter-institutional cooperation and dialogue.**

### Rethinking the role of communication in emergency situations

Following its contribution to the UN European and Central Asia Office of Disaster Risk Reduction (EFDRR) Conference in Athens in 2022, the following

year the UfM Secretariat joined the Romanian Department for Emergency Situations and the EFDRR, along with the European Civil Protection Directors-General to discuss experience and approaches towards building societal resilience through effective risk communication. Also discussed was the development of recommendations for governments and stakeholders to make risk communication more effective.

The sessions highlighted the complexity of communicating on issues with the potential to induce stress among citizens and society as a whole, in addition to social factors (economy, climate change, energy, etc.) which are at times destabilising. It seems that it is in these areas that misinformation and disinformation are flourishing, given the intense use of social networks.

Another point raised was that society should not be considered as a single block, and that it is necessary to take all its representations into account. This will make it possible to identify the groups to be targeted and to use the appropriate channels and messages.

In this sense, **participants stressed the need to adopt fully transparent national strategies based on scientific knowledge and an evaluation of the risk.** It is also necessary to work in "peacetime" and to capitalise on the relationship of trust between the authorities and citizens.

**It was also deemed necessary to rely on civil society networks and actors. Youth was also mentioned as a key factor both currently and in the future. It was noted that training and education initiatives on the use and understanding of social media are in place in several countries.** It was also noted that risk awareness, i.e. informing citizens in advance of the risks they may be exposed to, is crucial so that citizens know how to react and can be an ally of the emergency services.

**The sessions highlighted the complexity of communicating on issues with the potential to induce stress among citizens and society as a whole, in addition to social factors (economy, climate change, energy, etc.)**



# Acronyms and abbreviations

**AECID:** Spanish Agency for Cooperation

**AFD:** Agence Française de Développement (French Development Agency)

**AI:** Artificial Intelligence

**ANR:** Assisted Natural Regeneration

**CDP:** Cassa Depositi e Prestiti

**CEPES:** Confederación Empresarial Española de Economía Social (Spanish Confederation of Social Economy Entrepreneurs)

**CfA:** Call for action

**CIHEAM:** International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies

**CMI-UNOPS:** Centre for Mediterranean Integration-United Nations Office for Project Services

**CNR:** National Research Council (Italy)

**CoP:** Community of Practice

**COP:** Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

**CPMR:** Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions

**CRPD:** Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

**DG EAC:** Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission

**DG ECHO:** Directorate General of European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations of the European Commission

**DGEMPL:** European Commission's Directorate-General Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion of the European Commission

**EBRD:** European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

**ECAM:** European Corporate Council on Africa and the Middle East

**EEA:** European Environment Agency

**EFDRR:** Europe and Central Asia Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction

**EIB:** European Investment Bank

**EPR:** Extended Producer Responsibility

**EU:** European Union

**EUSEW:** European Sustainable Energy Week

**FAO:** Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

**GBF:** Global Biodiversity Framework

**GDP:** Gross Domestic Product

**GiZ:** Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Development Cooperation)

**GWP-Med:** Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean

**ICT:** Information and communication technology

**IME:** Mediterranean Water Institute

**IWRM:** Integrated Water Resources Management

**KfW:** Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau

**KMCFP:** Knowledge Management and Communication Framework Platform

**LUMI:** Large Unified Modern Infrastructure

**MAP:** Mediterranean Action Plan

**MBI:** Monaco Blue Initiative

**MedCOP:** an annual meeting of Mediterranean stakeholders for climate action

**MedNC:** Mediterranean Network of Second Chance Schools

**MENA:** Middle East and North Africa

**MSMEs:** Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises

**MVP:** Minimum viable product

**NCWR:** Non-conventional water resources

**NEET:** Not in education, employment, or training

**OGR:** Officine Grandi Riparazioni

**PAMEx:** Plan of Action for a Model Mediterranean Sea

**PLIFF:** PAMEx Local Investment Finance Facility

**PPRD:** Prevention, Preparedness and Response to natural and man-made Disasters'

**PRIMA:** Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area

**PWE:** Promoting Women's Empowerment

**R&I:** Research & Innovation

**RTAP:** Regional Transport Action Plan

**SDGs:** Sustainable Development Goals

**SDSN:** Sustainable Development Solutions Network

**SFS-Med:** Sustainable Food Systems in the Mediterranean

**Sida:** Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

**SME:** Small and medium-sized enterprise

**STEM:** Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics

**TEI:** Team Europe Initiative

**TouMaLi:** Tourism Marine Litter

**UfM:** Union for the Mediterranean

**UN CRPD:** United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

**UN:** United Nations

**UNEP MAP:** United Nations Environment Programme Mediterranean Action Plan

**UNEP:** United Nations Environment Programme

**UNESCO:** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

**UNIDO:** United Nations Industrial Development Organization

**UNIMED:** Mediterranean Universities Union

**WBF:** Women Business Forum

**WEFE:** Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems

**WHO:** World Health Organization

**WOC:** World Ocean Council

**WWAP:** World Water Assessment Programme



Union for the Mediterranean  
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الاتحاد من أجل المتوسط



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The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) is an intergovernmental Euro-Mediterranean organisation which brings together all countries of the European Union and 16 countries of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean. The UfM's mission is to enhance regional cooperation, dialogue and the implementation of projects and initiatives with tangible impacts on our citizens, with an emphasis on young people and women, in order to address the three strategic objectives of the region: stability, human development and integration.

# Building an inclusive and resilient Mediterranean



[ufmsecretariat.org](https://ufmsecretariat.org)



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