

Report on the Public Consultation in view of the 1st Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Higher Education



Barcelona, April 2023



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Report on the Public Consultation

in view of the 1st Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial
Conference on Higher Education

@2023 Union for the Mediterranean

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1 Foreword

Álvaro Albacete,

Deputy Secretary General in charge of Higher Education and Research

The UfM Public Consultation on Higher Education targeted the main Higher Education institutions and networks that interact in the Euro-Mediterranean area. It focused on the achievements and challenges of the past 15 years and was aimed at identifying concrete proposals for the future. The conclusions of this exercise, which you find in the present report, intend to inspire the ministers in charge of Higher Education defining new priorities of cooperation for the region at the UfM Ministerial Conference, which will be held in the last quarter of 2023 in Fez, Morocco. The contribution of all the stakeholders involved in this process, summed up in the present report, aims at feeding into the Ministerial Declaration to be adopted then, thus assuring that the expectations and necessities of Higher Education Institutions are taken in consideration.

The stakeholder's involvement in the preparation of the Ministerial Conference is not over: after the Consultation, a regional dialogue meeting was held in Casa Mediterráneo, Alicante, in March, whose results have been incorporated in the present report. This will be a permanent exercise to be conducted until the Fez Ministerial Conference and the Stakeholders' Policy Conference that will be held back-to-back with the conference.

At the UfM, we are convinced that regional cooperation on higher education and research plays an essential role in achieving an inclusive and sustainable development in the Mediterranean, especially for our younger generations, as it contributes to increase employability and promote intercultural dialogue. We foster regional dialogue on higher education with the purpose of facilitating continuous peer learning among our member countries on policies and practices addressing common challenges.

In the context of a global trend towards a new generation of universities, an ambitious higher education initiative covering the whole UfM region is necessary. This new impulse should capitalise on the existing regional networks and collaborations and ensure a transformative impact on the higher education systems and

institutions. The positive results of a programme such as Erasmus+ call for a stronger internationalisation of Euro-Mediterranean higher education systems, a process which should not be a goal in itself, but a means to enhance the quality of education and research.

The 2023 Fez Declaration will take stock of the many developments since the [2007 Cairo Declaration](#) and make them visible, but it will also lay the bases of our future partnerships, in light of all the developments that are currently changing the higher education landscape. This Declaration, supported by the 43 UfM Member States, will undoubtedly establish clear priorities for enhanced cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean area. The present report is an important milestone and will certainly help defining clear roadmaps for action.

2 Introduction

In view of the Ministerial Conference on Higher Education of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the UfM Secretariat launched a Public Consultation addressed to the main sectoral stakeholders (i.e. Higher Education Institutions, networks of Higher Education Institutions, networks of students) to collect input on the state of play of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation on higher education, its achievements so far and how to foster its further developments. The consultation was undertaken from December 2022 to February 2023.

Background of the public consultation

Since its establishment in 2008, cooperation on higher education and research has been one of the main priorities of the UfM, relying on the three main axes established in the Declaration of Cairo (2007)¹: academic mobility, employability and quality of education, and cooperation through university networks. In this context, the UfM has operated through a Regional Dialogue which involves the UfM Member States, the European Union (EU), and key relevant actors and stakeholders, with the objective of building a common vision on university cooperation and academic mobility within the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Recent publications provided a new impetus for this work. Thus, in 2020, the European Commission launched a general guidance on achieving the European Education Area by 2025². In February 2021, a New Agenda for the Mediterranean was established by the European Commission³, placing special importance in the field of education. In this context, the higher education sector has an essential role to play

within the overall EU-Southern Mediterranean cooperation, as recognised by EU's Erasmus+⁴ programme. The higher education sector of countries on both sides of the Mediterranean also needs to prepare itself for the future, for instance by fostering digital education, an action plan of which has been adopted by the European Commission for the period of 2021-2027⁵.

EU policies on the matter of higher education impulsed regional operations, in which the UfM is collaborating actively and steering collective efforts.

These efforts now start to bear fruits with the **Mediterranean becoming a priority region**, besides Africa, within the **Horizon Europe work programme 2023-2024** (published in December 2022⁶). It introduces the new 'Mediterranean Initiative', a series of R&I calls, which are an immediate result of the eight roadmaps on common research and innovation priorities in climate change, health, and renewable energies endorsed at the UfM R&I Ministerial on 27 June 2022. It widens the priority areas of cooperation in terms of higher education and research with the EU, the **Mediterranean having already been one of the pillars of its Erasmus+ programme** for a number of years.

In terms of **internationalisation of higher education**, the UfM navigates in an area of rapid evolution coming from a multitude of actors: the new Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe programmes, or the European Commission's strategy for universities certainly set strong frameworks and support structures to rethink the internationalisation practices of European universities. Besides the usual multilateral research projects or individual mobility schemes, a big game changer are the recently launched

¹ Towards a Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education & Research Area, First Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Higher Education and Scientific Research (Cairo Declaration - 18 June 2007).

https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/cairo_declaration.pdf

² Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0625&from=EN>

³ Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – A new Agenda for the Mediterranean. Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (February 2021) https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/joint_communication_renewed_partnership_southern_neighbourhood.pdf

⁴ Erasmus+ - <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/>

⁵ Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027).

<https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital-education/action-plan>

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_7404

European Universities initiatives, which have led to the formation of 44 alliances, involving around 340 higher education institutions in both capital cities and remote regions of 31 countries, including all EU Member States, Iceland, Norway, Serbia and Turkey⁷. Moreover, those alliances have been able to use some of the EU's international credit mobility programmes for exchanges and mobility with countries outside Europe, such as countries in the Southern Mediterranean⁸.

In October 2022, the UfM Senior Officials agreed to convene the first UfM Ministerial Conference on Higher Education in the year 2023. This new ministerial conference, with the provisional date on November 8th in Fez (Morocco), aims at a Ministerial Declaration supported by the 43 UfM Member States⁹. It lays the bases for a renewed regional cooperation on higher education and constitutes a powerful tool to give guidance to both policymakers and institutions by establishing clear priorities for cooperation.

To inform the process towards this first declaration since 15 years¹⁰, the UfM has been assembling input from a variety of stakeholders through different forms:

- forum for dialogues and sharing of best practices amongst its Member States, like the June 2022 UfM Ministerial Conference on Research and Innovation¹¹ or the regular Regional Dialogues on Higher Education, such as the one in the context of the UNESCO World Higher Education Conference 2022 in Barcelona¹²

- the June 2021 UfM Report on the Internationalisation of Higher Education in the Mediterranean, which presented a detailed context analysis and both country-specific recommendations and common themes for the Euro-Mediterranean region, with the aim of enhancing the internationalisation of higher education in the region¹³.
- the public consultation addressed to the main sectoral stakeholders, which aims at collecting achievements and challenges of regional cooperation on higher education, but also proposals for future development of it.

Procedure of the public consultation

The Secretariat of the UfM launched the online survey in December 2022. The survey consisted of three open questions, which could be answered in English, French, or Arabic, with a limit of 2000 characters for each answer (see detailed survey questions in Annex 1). The survey was open to individual citizens as well as representatives on the behalf of an institution.

On 17th March 2023, a stakeholders' meeting gave key representatives of different members and institutions an opportunity to further elaborate on the needs and suggestions previously expressed through the survey.

The UfM selected an external consultancy to read, analyse, and summarise the results of the public consultation and the respective stakeholders' meeting. The report presented here is the result of this work under the supervision of the UfM Secretariat.

⁷https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/news/all-research-and-innovation-news/launch-mediterranean-initiative-under-horizon-europe-cairo-2023-02-21_en

⁸ <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative>

⁹ <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20220526104242809>

¹⁰ See the list of the 34 memberships of the UfM: <https://ufmsecretariat.org/who-we-are/member%20states/>

¹¹ The last declaration was the "Cairo Declaration Towards a Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education & Research Area - First Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Higher Education and Scientific Research (June 2007)" - http://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/cairo_declaration.pdf

¹² <https://ufmsecretariat.org/ministerial-conference-research-innovation-2022/>

¹³ This regional dialogue meeting "Towards a Renewed Strategic Agenda for Cooperation on Higher Education and Research in the Mediterranean" involved the UfM Member States, the EU, higher education institutions (HEIs), universities networks, student networks and research centres. The aim was to share the latest regional priorities on higher education and research to contribute to the process leading to a renewed strategy reinforcing regional cooperation between higher education systems and higher education institutions within the Euro-Mediterranean region.

3 Overview of survey participation

Overall 103 valid response were obtained from this public consultation¹⁴.

Morocco (17 respondents), France (10 respondents), Palestine (8 respondents), Tunisia

and Greece (both 7 respondents) contributed with the largest number of respondents. 17 did not indicate any country of origin (N/A). The remaining distribution of respondents per country can be found in the following graphic.

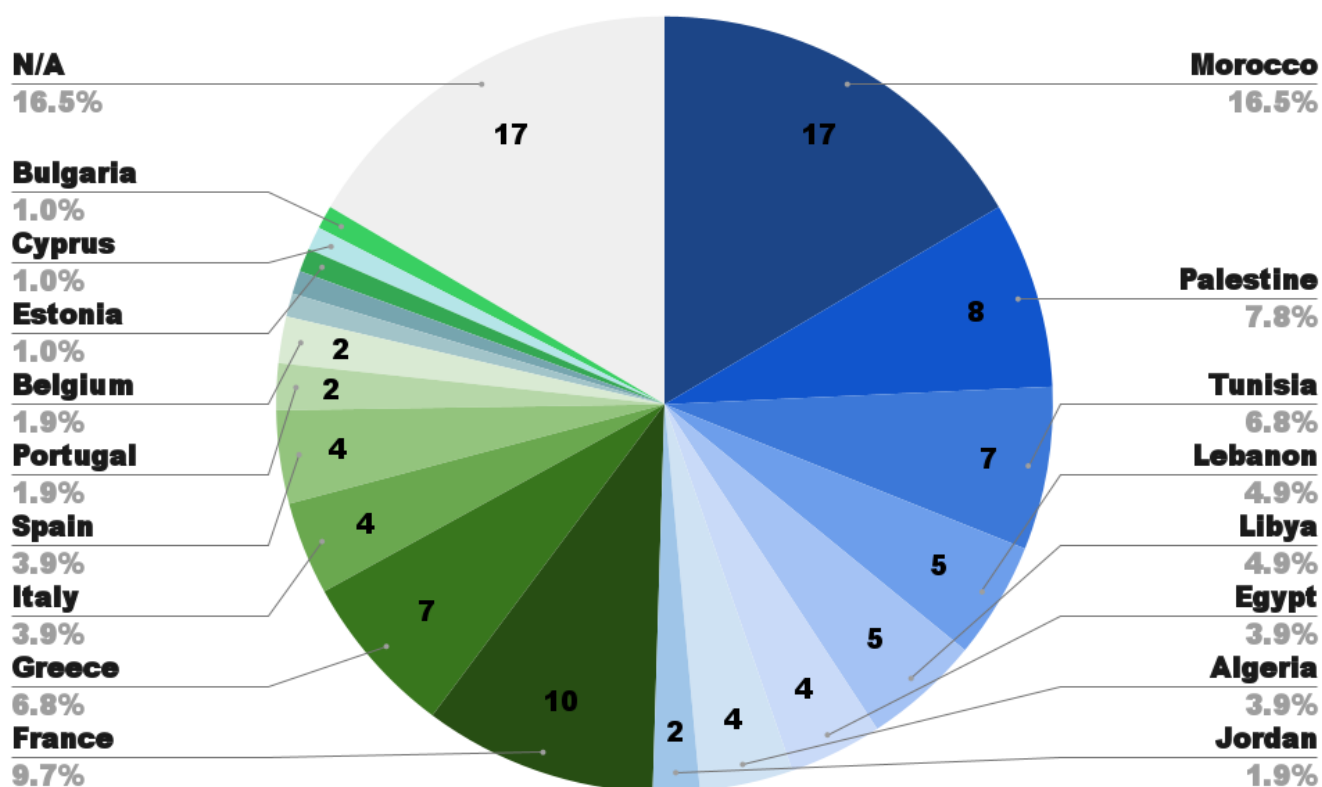


Fig. 1 The graph shows the distribution of countries of origins of the consultation respondents. N/A stands for respondents who did not indicate any country.

In terms of the type of stakeholder who answered the survey, the large majority came either from individual higher education institutions (38 different institutions) or were submitted in the name of individual citizens (37 respondents), not representing any institution. The participation of 7 networks of higher education institutions and 2 networks of student networks has to be noted as well, such as the contribution by 7 public authorities and 5 civil society organisations (Fig.

2). The detailed list of institutional public consultation respondents can be found in Annex 2.

The profile of the respondents was mostly only indicated for individual respondents and not for institutional responses. Amongst those respondents who indicated their capacity, 32 were professors, 9 students and 8 qualified themselves as researchers.

¹⁴ <https://ufmsecretariat.org/publication-speech/internationalisation-of-higher-education-mediterranean>

¹⁵ Empty responses or answers from non-member countries were not considered. Answers from Libya, with an observer status, were taken into account.

Types of stakeholders

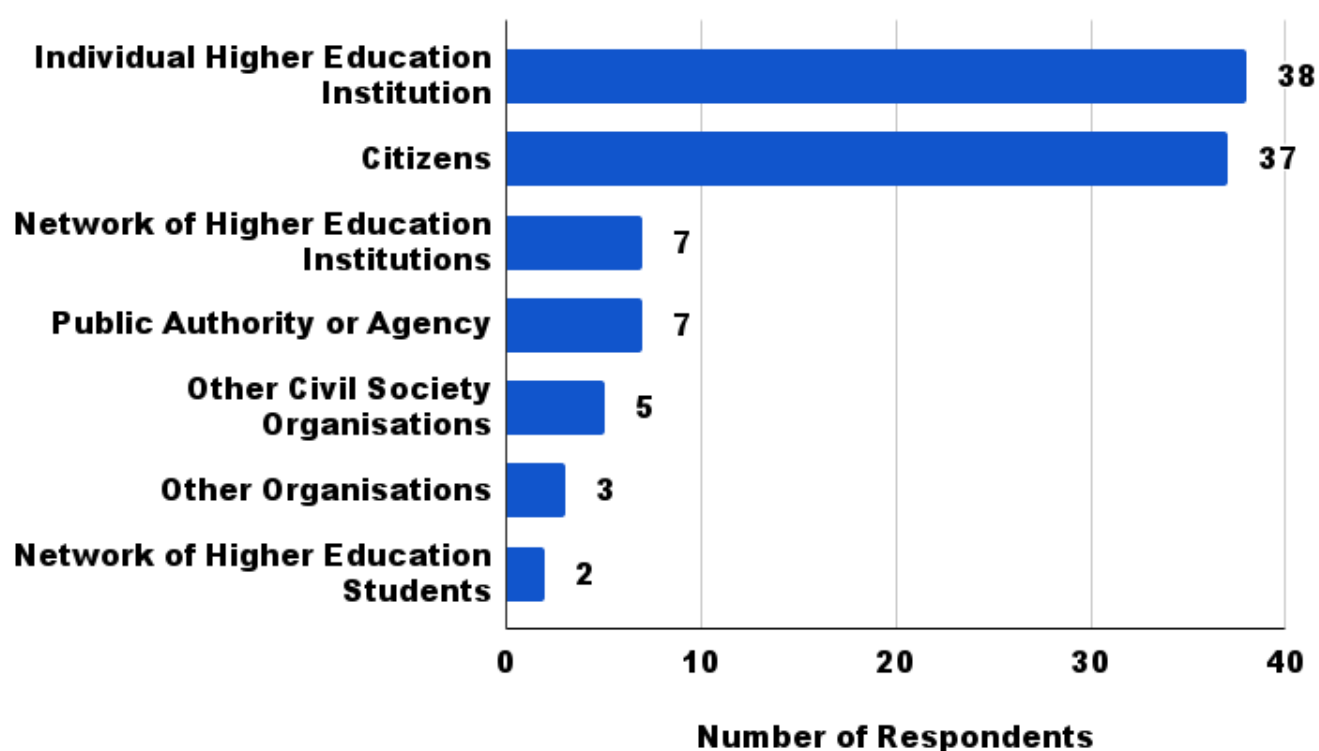


Fig. 2 Distribution of type of stakeholders amongst the public consultation respondents.

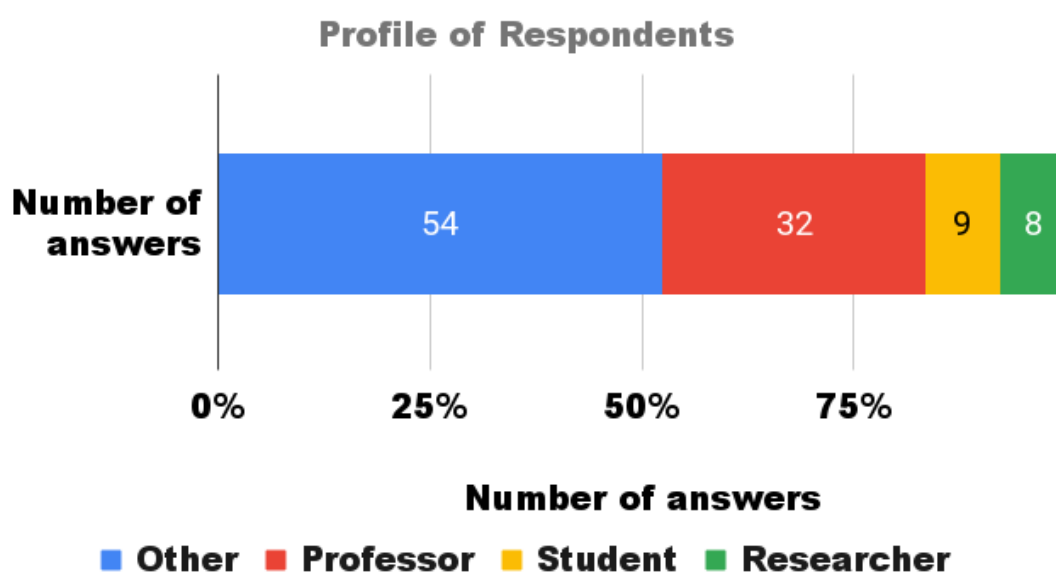


Fig. 3 Profile of the public consultation respondents.

4 Methodology of the responses analysis

The aim of the primary analysis was to understand what topics were emerging from the answers and what the position of the respondents on those topics were. It was key to ensure that the interpretation of the answers was as consistent as possible, independent of the language, of the analyst and of whether the answers were read at the beginning or at the end of the process. In order to maximise this consistency, the result analysis was carried out as follows:

1. Collection of the survey answers

The survey answers were collected in a spreadsheet to facilitate the quantitative analysis and transferred into a text editor for proper qualitative analysis.

2. Quantitative analysis of respondents

Statistics about the number, profile and origins of respondents were realised to understand the reach of the public consultation.

3. Design of the analytical grid for each question

An initial sample of 15 respondents was selected, and their answers analysed by the 3 analysts involved in the project. This seed corpus helped to get a first understanding of emerging topics and to build an analytical grid for each question. Given that the survey answers were either in English, French or Arabic, they were translated to English by the analysts and then introduced into the analytical grid. For each question, the answers were clustered and a set of overarching topics were identified. The topics identified independently by each of the 3 analysts were then compared, and a joint corpus of topics per question of the consultation was agreed upon. These topics served to create an analytical grid, into which the remaining answers were to be inserted.

4. Fitting the answers into the analytical grid

All remaining answers were then analysed, i.e. assigned to the corresponding topics, and the relevant parts of the answers summarised. The process was iterative: the chosen topics were iteratively refined throughout the reading process of the respective answers. For each answer, the identity of the respondent was kept for future reference. At the end of this part of the analysis, all answers of the public consultation were classified in an analytical matrix according to the topics they addressed.

5. Qualitative evaluation of answers per identified category

The answers within each category were ordered and clustered according to their content and arguments. Given that within the 6 themes, not only suggestions for the future were proposed, but also challenges were mentioned, it was decided to add a section dealing with the challenges for each of these 6 thematic areas. Accordingly, all the general challenges mentioned in the first part of the survey were assigned to one of the 6 corresponding thematic areas.

5 Achievements of the past years

As seen through the survey, the biggest **achievements** of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in the field of higher education in the past years can be boiled down into the following elements: **facilitated collaboration led to strengthened partnerships, the emergence of joint activities, institutions and declarations** and as such, created a diverse range of **impacts** on the stakeholders involved.

Increased opportunities for networking and collaboration

A key element mentioned by a large number of consultation respondents was that collaboration and networking between higher education organisations, governments, and research centres was facilitated through a range of different means. Having joint platforms clearly led to a strengthening of the Euro-Mediterranean community, which could turn common challenges into opportunities. In concrete terms, this setting then helped the establishment of joint programmes, courses, research projects and initiatives.

The New Agenda for the Mediterranean is based on the conviction that by working together and in a spirit of partnership, common challenges can be turned into opportunities.

Malta Further and Higher Education Authority

Many **enablers for collaboration** were mentioned, and notably:

- Euro-Mediterranean Research and Innovation Platform
- UfM's regional dialogue process on "Higher

Education Internationalisation and Academic Mobility in the Euro-Mediterranean region"

- UNIMED – Mediterranean Universities Union
- Réseau Euro-Méditerranéen des Enseignants et des Chercheurs (REMEC) which offers joint research and education opportunities
- Euromed University of Fez - created in the framework of the Cairo declaration
- Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI) -created in the framework of the Cairo declaration
- International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies - CIHEAM
- Euro-Mediterranean Academic Network (EMAN)
- Erasmus Student Network and local organisations similar to ESN (e.g. University of Jordan International Student Network and Erasmus Morocco Network), which allow for all students to engage in internationalisation at home and interact with incoming mobility participants.

Besides **organisations** or **platforms** provided by the organisations, **funding** or **policy instruments** promoted cooperation between institutions from both sides of the Mediterranean. Major players were **EU-funded programs**, mostly Erasmus+, but also the Horizon 2020 program.

Southern Mediterranean higher education institutions participated increasingly in the past years in these programs, especially since the implementation of the **International Credit Mobility**¹⁶ in 2015, resulting in over 40,000 mobilities in the South Mediterranean from 2015 to 2020. Also, Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees¹⁷ and Capacity Building in Higher Education projects¹⁸ have played their role, with over 1100 projects where a Southern Mediterranean organisation participated as a coordinator or partner, according to the Erasmus Student Network. The Erasmus+ virtual exchange¹⁹ was regarded as another successful

¹⁶ Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility (ICM) Programme supports the mobility of individuals enrolled or employed at a higher education institution (HEI), from a Programme Country to a Third Country Not Associated to the Programme or vice versa

¹⁷<https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/opportunities/opportunities-for-individuals/students/erasmus-mundus-joint-masters-scholarships>

¹⁸ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-b/key-action-2/capacity-building-higher-education>

¹⁹ https://youth.europa.eu/erasmusvirtual_en

pilot initiative. One respondent argued that in the past years, Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries have invested a significant share of their budget into higher education, comparatively more than the global average.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, other international EU-funded projects or the rising importance of ranking agencies, were some of the elements mentioned that provided a framework for working together on common global challenges.

More specifically, various declarations and strategies aiming at strengthening collaborations in higher education research and innovation in the Mediterranean were seen to provide guiding principles for collaboration.

Outcomes of the collaborations, mobilities and capacity building

As commented above, one outcome was the increased and widened possibilities for mobility with different stakeholders: besides trans-Mediterranean mobility, South-South mobility was strengthened, and more doors were opened to do internships all over the Mediterranean. Progress on mutual recognition of studies has definitely been made. For example, Morocco has been aligning their higher education frameworks with internationally recognised standards such as the ECTS, but there is still a lot of room for improvement, as will be highlighted further below.

Facilitation and development of collaboration led to institutional partnerships, development of joint programs, joint research projects and joint initiatives across the Mediterranean through the productive role played by collaboration enablers mentioned above.

Examples of concrete outcomes mentioned were:

- Establishment of numerous co-diplomas and joint Degrees between North and Southern Mediterranean
- Co-supervised theses with a significant increase in the number of quality co-authored publications

- Joint projects in scientific cooperation, research and innovation (e.g. European Initiative for Coordination of Agricultural Research in the Mediterranean (ARIMNet) and Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA). Spillover effect, as those contribute to quality education
- Establishment of an Interreg Euro-MED Academy, which makes accessible and available to a wider audience the knowledge and skills developed by its transnational cooperation projects of the Interreg MED Programme
- Increase of joint projects under international programs dealing with capacity building
- Several initiatives by the EU and the UfM were reported to have facilitated the raising awareness on the importance of building an entrepreneurial ecosystem and development of entrepreneurial skills among students and faculty, particularly in southern Mediterranean institutions
- Treaty to fight pollution and preserve biodiversity
- Adoption of a strategy that regulated and developed ICT use and blended learning

The capacity for such a large number of institutions to work together successfully despite their differences of origin, culture, institutional history and strategies, is due especially to the success in building cooperation mechanisms and shared governance and decision-making frameworks.

It was reiterated that working jointly led to capacity building amongst members. Specifically, the dedicated capacity building funding of Erasmus+ actively allowed support for academics in different HEIs to exchange experiences and learn new skills. This concretely led to enhanced academic and research quality in the Euro-Mediterranean region, the establishment of common standards, and the creation of joint research programs.

In some cases, it was mentioned that cooperation with European partners also led to specific benefits to stakeholders from Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries, such as the

²⁰ Double ambition: to enhance coordination of agricultural research programmes within the Mediterranean area and to improve the cooperation within the area. <https://www.era-learn.eu/network-information/networks/arimnet>

²¹ Aim is to achieve, support and promote integration, alignment and joint implementation of national R&I programmes under a common research and innovation strategy to address the diverse challenges in water scarcity, agriculture, and food security. <https://prima-med.org/who-we-are/>

²² <https://www.interreg-euro-med-academy.eu/>

capacity to develop infrastructure, “improve standard of living for poverty through education from European collaboration” and “enhance scientific research in Arab universities”.

Creating local impact

Survey respondents highlighted that Erasmus+ programme impacted internationalisation strategies of institutions around the Mediterranean positively.

Besides the institutional impact of such collaboration, the largest impact was naturally on the individuals themselves. Respondents appreciated the impact collaboration and exchange programs created, most importantly as they strengthen dialogue, intercultural competences and the development of a common language about joint challenges of the Mediterranean. Those were seen as the basics for creating a just, shared and peaceful future, and to preserve and understand the cultural heritage of the Mediterranean.

Perhaps the greatest achievement was facilitating the emergence of a Euro-Med higher education community with increasing self-awareness of a common identity and a sense of togetherness that did not exist before.

Lebanese American University

6 Addressing challenges and looking into the future

Six main themes framing Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in higher education have been identified by the Jordanian and EU co-presidency of the UfM. These themes will be key to define priorities and actions that will be supported in the coming years. The public consultation therefore asked respondents to make suggestions on how to boost Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in the field of higher education in these 6 themes. These suggestions have to be read in the light of the challenges identified by the respondents.

It is important to note that the theme of “Internationalisation” gives a broad overview on cooperation in higher education in the Mediterranean, while the other 5 themes from the Public Consultation may take up some points raised in the first chapter and discuss it in more depth.



Internationalisation



Inclusion, including the gender dimension



Digital education



Fundamental academic values



Governance



Greening / Sustainable Development

Internationalisation

In terms of internationalisation, **two main preconditions** emerged from the consultation, in order to implement joint initiatives on the international level: the necessity to overcome practical barriers and the need to create a common vision.

Asymmetric or insufficient scientific resources and outputs, differences in the level of high school graduates, financial supports, quality control and accreditation schemes, and incompatible administrative and financial procedures have been identified as the main barriers, attributed to the systems and its resources. On the other hand, the **frequent lack of leadership** to support individuals and

institutions for working together towards a common vision and implementing a joint strategy of cooperation in the Mediterranean has been characterised as a major hurdle.

Consequently, there was **a clear wish to address these barriers** and in this way ensure that higher education institutions in the region can provide fair opportunities for students and faculty and increase mobility (especially North to South or South-South) of them. This would lead to greater cultural exchange, peer-learning, access to global knowledge and resources, foster (long-term) collaborations, economic benefits and sustainable development of the region and higher education institutions, development of human capital and the promotion of peace and stability.

Complementary contributions from the UfM Higher Education Stakeholders' Meeting, 17 March 2023, Alicante, Spain

Internationalisation is a means more than an aim per se, thus, having clear aims is crucial in internationalisation both at the institutional and governmental level. The political rationale behind the creation of the Erasmus programme has been achieved by promoting a sense of European identity amongst students. However, the worldwide dominant economic rationale based on attraction for financial gains (i.e. application of differential fees) targeting international students has led to competition and inequality in higher education. The Euro-Mediterranean region presents an authentic opportunity to improve intercultural understanding, knowledge sharing, and collaboration as long as to combat discrimination.

Facing the asymmetric distribution of funds and opportunities amongst member states

The situation has to be seen within **asymmetric pre-conditions around the Mediterranean**. Some countries still lack adequate funding and infrastructure for higher education, leading to disparities in access to education and opportunities for students. The inequality has been compounded by an **uneven participation of countries and HEIs in programs and initiatives**, partly due to the lack of a common framework. **Social inclusion is also a key challenge** for young people, with most mobility opportunities going to those from higher income backgrounds. The consequence has been a lack of equality and reciprocity in partnership and mobility.

Limited access to education and opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and those living in remote or rural areas, which can be a barrier to participation in international cooperation initiatives.

UNIMED

Complementary contributions from the UfM Higher Education Stakeholders' Meeting, 17 March 2023, Alicante, Spain

- Adapt the existing tools and support mechanisms to fit the purpose of boosting grassroots participation in internationalisation.

Increasing support for internationalisation of higher education

Financial barriers pose in general significant challenges, particularly for non-EU member countries. It was clear from many respondents that **mobilities of students and academic staff remain highly dependent on Erasmus+ funding**, while obtaining this and other European financial support is considered difficult due to challenging criteria. Thereby, it was noted that **knowledge and expertise on how best to use the European funds available (i.e. mobility funds) is missing**. Some respondents felt that European funds for collaborations between North and South Mediterranean countries have been decreasing (suggesting for instance that the war in Ukraine has diverted EU attention and resources away from the Mediterranean). Besides the dependency on funding from European sources, regional and local regulations made **financial autonomy of higher education institutions** challenging.

Several respondents suggested **increasing EU funding for Mediterranean initiatives, with a particular focus on the International Credit Mobility (ICM) programme**. In general, an enhanced Erasmus+ programme, with more resources from national budgets was suggested,

and within this one give priority to Euro-Mediterranean consortia in the framework of calls for projects.

At the same time, respondents pointed out that **government support for international cooperation in higher education** should be encouraged, including financial support and policies that facilitate cross-border collaboration.

All in all, financial constraints have been seen to limit collaborations between South-South and North-South, as well as the ability to scale up and sustain successful joint projects or joint degrees. These constraints can also impede the retention of top faculty and students.

Limited opportunities for international collaboration and exchange: many HEIs lack the opportunities and resources to collaborate and exchange with academic institutions around the Mediterranean, which can limit their ability to contribute to the global academic community and to benefit from international perspectives and expertise.

Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI)

Complementary contributions from the UfM Higher Education Stakeholders' Meeting, 17 March 2023, Alicante, Spain

- It was proposed to give a more crucial role to the UfM and means to manage some of the HEI systems, as no other institutions in the region could gather everyone together to enhance cooperation. In this sense the idea of a Euromed Erasmus was put on the table. The idea got support, by mention of statistics, which indicate that the most important point for European integration has been the Erasmus program. The same could thus be thought of for the Euromed region. Some proposed thus to give a percentage of Erasmus+ to be managed by the UfM (e.g. manage student mobility or funds to bring researchers together); others were concerned about depending too much on Erasmus+ funds, and thus proposed to create new instruments, based on co-funding of the UfM member States.

Reducing administrative obstacles to mobility

Administrative barriers have been other major challenges facing higher education institutions and individuals in the region. Administrative barriers include difficulties in obtaining **visas** for international mobility, general **bureaucracy** that complicates cooperation efforts, but also **internal communication gaps** in passing and reaching the relevant information to the target audience.

To facilitate mobility, it was suggested that the EU work on reducing administrative barriers, such as **facilitating visa obtention for entering Europe for meetings and conferences or standardising visa procedures** to allow for more exchange and collaboration across the region. The idea of an **"Erasmus Visa"** was also mentioned.

Unequal access to opportunities between the North and South Mediterranean countries, including visa restrictions that can limit the mobility of students, researchers, and academics and increase the costs associated with obtaining visas.

Mediterranean Youth Council

Alignment of regional and national educational systems

A major hurdle identified in terms of bureaucracy is the **high fragmentation of regional and national educational systems and consequently their academic calendars, grading scales, curriculum structures, and most importantly credit recognition and assessment procedures and systems**. This issue is particularly prevalent in cases where qualifications or diploma frameworks are not standardised or aligned with other educational systems. The **lack of understanding** of education system differences can lead to additional misunderstandings or misinterpretations, and miscommunications between the different stakeholders involved. As a result, students who have obtained degrees or qualifications in one country may face challenges when attempting to use these credentials in another country, especially when there is a lack of transparency and mutual recognition between educational systems.

It was thus proposed to **strengthen policy coordination in order to encourage the harmonisation of higher education policies and regulations across the Euro-Mediterranean region**. The focus thereby should be on ensuring compatibility (some talk about standardisation) and mutual recognition of degrees and qualifications. Some argue in favour of the Euro-Mediterranean region to approximate the Bologna process and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). On a curricula level respondents seem to favour a stronger harmonisation, without forgetting to **match their content/levels with the real needs of each region**. Working in those domains may help to reduce the fragmentation and improve the transparency and recognition of qualifications.

Another reiterated way to ease mobility and encourage studying abroad was to fight the

language barrier and **promote multilingualism through language immersion programmes or preparatory virtual exchanges**. A respondent emphasised for instance that it should be avoided that all exchange programs use English as primary language.

In addition, some respondents highlighted the need of **setting up joint tools to monitor and assess the quality of international collaborations in higher education**. Concretely, it was proposed to establish a common framework and methodology for improved data collection, monitoring, and accessibility of information on internationalisation activities. This has to be complemented by the improvement of technical skills and equipment.

In conclusion, the challenges facing the recognition and assessment of qualifications in different educational systems are complex and multifaceted. Addressing these challenges will require a **collaborative effort from academic institutions, policymakers, and other stakeholders to develop more standardised, transparent, and compatible systems for recognising and assessing qualifications**.

Complementary contributions from the UfM Higher Education Stakeholders' Meeting, 17 March 2023, Alicante, Spain

- Aimed at establishing a comprehensive education system across various states that allows for recognition of diverse diplomas and transfer of academic credits between Euromed countries, it was recommended to consider either utilising the European accreditation agency or creating a new Euromed accreditation agency. This would ensure that educational institutions across Euromed countries adhere to similar standards and guidelines, promoting uniformity in the quality of the education offered.

Lack of leadership to build a strategy of cooperation

One of the major issues identified by some respondents is the **lack of commitment of decision makers at different levels**. Not only decision makers but also the general public seems to lack awareness about the existence and benefits of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership and the actions and initiatives of the

UfM. There seems to be a **general lack of understanding and even misinformation around international education**.

This goes hand in hand with the identified challenge of the **absence of a clear strategy of cooperation that is built on regional priorities**. Without such a strategy, it is difficult to identify the key areas where collaboration is most needed and to effectively allocate resources towards achieving common goals. The **lack of a common and coordinated political approach** on both sides from the Mediterranean was deplored.

In concrete terms, one respondent stated that 17 years have passed since the Cairo Declaration, and that the **two stated aims of creating an Euromed Higher Education Area and an Euromed Research Area are far from being achieved**. Moreover, it was argued that the majority of the operative objectives remain unachieved.

Socio-political and economic conditions on the ground added external obstacles to effective long-term strategic planning and made cooperation non-sustainable and vulnerable. Conflicts, political instability and tensions, security concerns, economic protectionism and nationalist policies are some of those external factors which were considered a challenge for cooperation. And even in the case of ongoing collaborations, it was observed that some projects were **not adapted to the local (geopolitical) conditions**.

It has to be emphasised as well that respondents acknowledged the **existence of negative perceptions, stereotypes and prejudices towards Southern Mediterranean countries, based on cultural and religious aspects**, which have in some cases been reinforced by extreme right governments in Europe.

Complementary contributions from the UfM Higher Education Stakeholders' Meeting, 17 March 2023, Alicante, Spain

- The biggest achievement is the creation of a structure and process; although not perfect, there is more sense of ownership. It is important to include stakeholders and the public at large. Since the Euromed area is not yet known to the public, there is a lack of awareness of the process.
- It was commented that the Declaration of Cairo is still in effect and maintains its value. But many of Cairo Declaration's objectives were not attainable and there was no follow-up; a conference at Euromed level is needed for this follow-up. There is also a need for engagement and commitment from the southern (Mediterranean) countries in this collaboration (declaration).

Setting the pre-conditions for developing effective strategies and partnerships

For the reasons mentioned above, **strategic planning and effective partnerships and collaboration require the involvement and commitment of leaders at all levels - local, national, and regional**. Therefore, it was deemed important that, on the one hand, member states of the UfM give stronger **prioritisation to higher education** and, on the other hand, that EU member states provide stronger political support for the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries.

Respondents subsequently proposed to **seek for more effective channels of communication among stakeholders in the region to encourage**

dialogue, mutual understanding, sharing of best practices and ultimately enable strategic collaborations. European and regional university networks, events or conferences, online platforms, but also permanent forums for dialogue with national and international networks, in line with the policy dialogue promoted by DG Education, could play a role. In all cases, the inclusion of educators and students into discussions should be neglected. Some propose that the UfM should recommend the **European commission to include further universities from the Mediterranean into the European University Alliances²³ (e.g. initially as associate partners)**. Another proposition is to integrate Mediterranean partner countries in the European Research Area. All those platforms of integration and cooperation have been

²³ <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative>

recognised by the consultation respondents to **promote intercultural understanding, ideas, perspectives, and understanding each other's distinct and common cultural heritage: beneficial steps towards deconstructing prejudices and stereotypes, fighting xenophobia and racism**, which have been identified above as hurdles to cooperation.

Throughout those platforms for dialogue, different suggestions were formulated, which together sum up towards the elaboration and implementation of joint internationalisation strategies:

- **Target training and peer-learning activities** for academic leaders and leaders from university administration
- Incentivise individual institutions to **develop their own internationalisation strategies**, and in this way increasing the attractiveness of their institutions in the region and widen the opportunities for internationalisation.
- Enforce collaborations through **high quality smaller scale initiatives**. An example would be to **strengthen ongoing bilateral collaborations** to overcome some obstacles to internationalisation, such as credit recognition or language barriers.
- **Increase and broaden number of partnerships** between HEIs from Southern and Northern Mediterranean shores, while taking into account local needs

- **Develop a regional strategy for internationalisation in the Mediterranean** that include amongst others aspects of mobility, capacity building, peer-learning and research.
- Go one step beyond and work with Mediterranean countries as an interface between the **EU and sub-Saharan African countries**

"Furthermore, given the lack of understanding and even misinformation around international education, more effective channels of communication should be sought between educational institutions and relevant stakeholders, taking advantage of regional networks and emphasising a regional approach. Regional networks of higher education institutions could enable the collaborative development of a regional strategy for internationalisation in the region, and support capacity building of individual institutions in the development of their strategies, also with the aim of increasing both the attractiveness of institutions in the region, and North-South and South-South mobility. "

Center for Mediterranean Integration, UNOPS

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- Apply a holistic approach to internationalisation, involving the whole institution, including its leadership, faculty, staff, students, and community.
- Student organisations should be supported and guided to develop connections with existing networks. This will allow them to develop internally and become important players in their universities, representing the student's voices and helping to increase the broader societal impact of the universities.
- Make good use of internationalisation as a means to improve the quality of teaching, research, and service to society for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society.
- To have an internationalisation for society and the global common good, it is needed to move away from a competitive model based on an economic rationale and return to a collaborative model based on a political and societal rationale
- Promote professionalisation and professional development of leaders and managers in HEI: a lack of training in Euro Mediterranean; leading positions and manager training.
- Promote more flexible institutions and anticipative management.

- Increase the HEI's attractiveness as an international partner with student participation in international networks.
- The Mediterranean, with its 500 million people, could connect both continents, with Africa, which is expected to have a fourth of the world's population by 2100, at its doorstep. Economic integration between the two continents would benefit everyone in Europe. Necessary resources must be committed and both the South and the North should be engaged.

Implementing joint activities

To encourage international collaboration in a sustainable fashion, it was deemed important to **start small and scale up over time**. Thus provide support to the steps prior to the creation of structured mobility and joint degree, master's, and doctoral programs. This allows for testing and refinement of ideas, building trust and understanding between partners, and increasing the chances of success. As mentioned above, bilateral collaborations can serve as valuable test beds for overcoming obstacles to internationalisation.

To facilitate the creation of joint activities, the suggestion was made to build teams and working groups organised by areas of expertise. This can apply to various areas, such as education, research, administration, and more. Such sharing of best practices and working towards common goals, allows for the pooling of resources, to adopt new approaches that have proven effective elsewhere. As a concrete example, it was suggested to reinforce the **capacity building** of researchers from Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries with regard to research methodology, R&I management and knowledge transfer, given that they lack behind compared to their European peers. It was argued that European academics have more time to dedicate to research than the ones in the Southern Mediterranean, which have teaching as priority²⁴.

Through these working groups, partners can build long-term relationships, develop mutual trust and understanding, and achieve better outcomes than they could alone. In addition, sharing data and research results can enable partners to collaborate more effectively and generate new insights that benefit all involved. Concrete suggestions came out of the public consultation for joint activities:

- **Short mobilities and programs:**
 - summer schools (which should be recognised with ECTS)
 - hackathons
 - collaborative training and capacity building programs (with a particular emphasis on supporting researchers from the southern Mediterranean)
- **Seminars**
- **Joint Research projects**
- Joint and shared **degree programs** or courses between universities in the Euro-Mediterranean region.
- **Internationalisation at home** by promotion of:
 - intercultural activities on campus
 - development of study programmes in partnership with foreign institutions
 - teaching in foreign languages
 - integration of international topics in the study programmes
 - creating virtual partnerships and mobility with international HEIs
 - creating student forums for exchange and research
 - support for student organisations to enable better internationalisation at home, with a resurgence of grassroots movements in the post-pandemic context in the South Mediterranean region.
 - Capacity building in using digital technologies
 - Internet access in HEIs

There are many ideas, but finding successful implementation is challenging.

Paeradigms

²⁴ The logic would be that therefore vice versa, academics from Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries train European academics in teaching skills. This was however not proposed within the consultation.

All those activities were mostly aimed at addressing common challenges of the Euro-Mediterranean and at building critical citizens (drivers of change) who thanks to their in-depth knowledge and understanding of the region's challenges and opportunities could contribute to its economic, cultural and social development.

In terms of examples (a non-exhaustive list²⁵) of topics to be addressed were mentioned:

- Sustainable Development Goals (in general, actions and programmes with societal and economic impact, which promote human, civilisational values, and peace)
- Social and Human Sciences, with the idea to create “The Mediterranean Observatory of Humanities and Social Sciences” in order to build a strategy for the promotion of these sciences and help frame the future actions of development within societies.
- Digital technologies²⁶
- Food and security
- Biomedical Sciences and Health innovations

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- Switch to a political-societal rationale, which helps to move towards a collaborative and inclusive model of internationalisation that benefits society and the global common good.
 - Internationalisation initiatives should have a positive impact on both participants and society.
 - Prioritise topics like climate change in the declaration.
 - Internationalisation should be needs-based and goal-oriented, with activities embedded in a logic of evaluation, complementarity, and institutional/social transformation.
- **Access to information:** The Cairo Declaration pointed out the need to create a shared library. It was suggested to negotiate with one voice to providers like Web of Science (which is considered very expensive) to get access to information, and persuading them to lower the fees.

²⁵ Often related to the own specialisations of the public consultation. It is recommended to perform a separate survey and analysis on topics of prioritisation in the Mediterranean.

²⁶ A specific suggestion was to dive into new trends in extended realities (VR, AR, MR, XR ...) applied in learning contexts in all fields of education (technology, medicine, engineering, mechanics, culture, history or tourism).



Internationalisation Summary Points

1. Foster the **standardisation and recognition of curricula and diplomas**:
 - a. Encourage the **harmonisation of higher education policies and regulations** across the Euro-Mediterranean region, with a focus on ensuring **compatibility and mutual recognition of degrees and qualifications**.
 - b. Harmonise the content of training courses and match their content with the real needs of each country.
2. Set up joint tools to **monitor the quality of international collaborations**.
3. **Facilitate mobility** (e.g. facilitating visa obtention for meetings and conferences or standardised visa procedures and an "Erasmus Visa", reduce administrative barriers)
4. Promote **regular networking opportunities and conferences through university networks, permanent forums or other platforms to encourage dialogue and collaboration**.
5. **Promote multilingual competencies, the Mediterranean dimension and intercultural understanding**, ideas, perspectives, and cultural heritage through collaborative activities.
6. Design more effective **channels and platforms of communication** for collaborative development of a **regional strategy for internationalisation**, and **support capacity building of individual institutions** in the development of **their strategies**:
 - a. **Renewed commitment and a corresponding allocation of resources** and policies that facilitate cross-border collaboration by governments and the higher education sectors of both shores of the Mediterranean is needed
 - b. A comprehensive and responsible **internationalisation strategy is needed as a governance tool for HEIs**, and should follow quality standards to **ensure opportunities for all**.
7. **Increase EU funding for Euro-Mediterranean higher education programmes** (Mediterranean initiatives, International Credit Mobility ICM) and think about a dedicated Euro-Mediterranean Erasmus program or other form of mobility program managed by the UfM.
8. Better integrate Mediterranean partners into **European Research Area and into European University Alliances** (e.g. initially as associate partners)
9. Encourage the development of joint activities, following the principles of a.) start small and scale up, b.) being needs-based and goal-oriented, and c.) embedding them in a logic of evaluation, complementarity, and institutional/social transformation:
 - a. **Short mobilities and programs** (e.g. summer schools, hackathons, capacity building programs)
 - b. **Seminars on common challenges** of the Euro-Mediterranean
 - c. **Joint Research projects** on common challenges (reinforce **capacity building** of researchers from Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries)
 - d. Joint **degree programs or courses** between HEIs in the Euro-Mediterranean region
 - e. **Internationalisation at home** by promotion of intercultural activities on campus, development of study programmes in partnership with foreign institutions, teaching in foreign languages, integration of international topics in the study programmes, creating virtual partnerships and mobility with international universities.

Digital Education

While a positive consensus exists among Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) of the Mediterranean region in the wake of the Cairo Declaration, similar challenges are faced by HEIs in the Mediterranean in establishing a level of digital education which they aim to have. Primarily, there are **limited resources** to invest in digital education. There is **limited infrastructure and qualified personnel** as well as **limited digital literacy**. Importantly, in order to take steps forward, proper **strategic planning** for digital education is missing. The following subsections highlight the different areas of digital education that need to be tackled and suggested solutions in order to do so.

Capacity building and peer-learning

The limitations faced by HEIs in UfM State Members in digital education highlight the need for capacity building in digital education, primarily through **regular training for digital education and digital transformation** as well as **increased projects for capacity building**.

“Promote in universities regular and advanced training in digital education, practising the link between Higher Education Institutions and the various organisations of society, at the level of transversal projects and / or internships, in line with the Action Plan for Education Digital 2021-2027.”

Universidade Lusófona, Portugal

Support for and capacity building of digital education can come in various ways including the **use and design of digital learning schemes** that would be ideally supported by digital coaching and mentoring.

Capacity building comes hand in hand with **investment in the infrastructure** for digital education. HEIs can build capacity through **increased funding options** and **new or different methods for identifying and obtaining resources** for digital education. Support for the use of more **innovative methodologies** and ICT for advancing higher education is needed. Supporting new technologies includes

modernisation of legal frameworks and distance learning where virtual exchanges can also take place as well as blended (collaborative) intensive programs.

Creating common **teaching and training platforms** was among several suggestions described by stakeholders for advancing digital education in the Euro-Mediterranean. Such platforms can be used to **facilitate sharing and exchange of information and experiences**, as well as **sharing tools and programs** between HEIs in the Euro-Mediterranean. Online learning resources and programmes such as Open Educational Resources (OERs)²⁷ and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)²⁸ can be developed and shared by different HEIs of UfM State Members.

Digital education is also seen by member stakeholders as a method of **strengthening and expanding their network** through the use of **shared platforms** that contain lists of the different HEIs within UfM State Members in order to facilitate identification of partners and collaboration and ease communication. Shared platforms can also serve for providing a **digital library with open access and open science** to UfM State Members. Due to mobility programs that exist within and between the HEIs of the UfM such as Erasmus+, a **platform sharing the opportunities and details that support such mobility** (a “mobility platform”) would prove very useful.

There is a strong shared opinion that the use of digital education through platforms for **peer-learning** would be of great value for HEIs within UfM State Members. Through peer-learning approaches, where HEIs within the same country or between different countries, professors and students can **share their knowledge and experiences**. A major advantage of digital education is the possibility of having **online teaching** (e-teaching) programs. Through digital education, both e-teaching and e-learning are seen as highly beneficial and a crucial aspect of digital education capacity. Supporting digital education can therefore be done by **providing training for teachers and professors to conduct e-teaching** as well as providing **sessions for peer e-learning**. In addition to online peer-learning and knowledge-sharing, **joint events** such as conferences and workshops create open spaces for **sharing knowledge and**

²⁷ Open Educational Resources | UNESCO

²⁸ MOOC.org | Massive Open Online Courses | An edX Site

experiences and **strengthening partnerships** and collaboration for digital education.

Complementary contributions from the UfM Higher Education Stakeholders' Meeting, 17 March 2023, Alicante, Spain

Priorities for Digital Education:

- **Improving infrastructure and access.** Tools for inclusion and exclusion are needed to ensure integration of students with difficult economic backgrounds, and handicap, for example. Support must be present at the institution and 'people-training' level.
- **Teachers training and digital literacy must be fostered.** Also, pedagogic innovation in this area has to be strengthened. Incentives and rewards for their work by including digital tools and methods into teaching, while being part of a community.

Different levels of international cooperation:

- **Establishment of an Open European Mediterranean University alliance**, with the aim to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and openly licensed materials as a tool for democratising access to education, to provide training opportunities for teachers, and to offer students virtual mobility and virtual exchange opportunities, providing them with the possibility to take fully recognised and accredited degrees or courses totally based on Open Educational Resources (OER)
- **Share experiences content**, a space to learn, provide training opportunities for teachers, partnering with private sector or IO (like UNESCO or Category 2 Centre under the auspices of UNESCO (ARCWH)²⁹.
- Bring the different stakeholders together to make a **holistic transformation** in HEIs.

Accreditation of digital education

A repeated issue that was highlighted by respondents is that some HEIs in UfM State Members do not yet recognise digital education diplomas or titles. A necessary step for ensuring capacity and support for digital education is the **establishment of systems for evaluation and accreditation of digital education titles and diplomas in HEIs**. UfM membership and the Cairo Declaration serves as a strategic approach for partnership thus opening potential opportunities to implement new diplomas in digital education through international partnership.

Encouraging joint online programs

UfM membership and the signing of the Cairo Declaration have led to increased and stronger partnership. Opportunities for using established partnerships and creating new ones motivate the implementation of **joint online diploma courses and programs** (joint programs in Erasmus+, for example). Online programs can also serve as platforms for promoting and establishing **partnerships between academia and industry or public and private sectors** at the national and international level. Joint online programs can also

be used as strategic approaches for allowing digital transformation for HEIs in the Euromed region.

Reducing barriers

Mobility of students and professors within and between Euro-Mediterranean countries is **not available or accessible to everyone**. Facilitating access to programs and courses through **e-/distance learning can shorten this gap** for students at home as well as students from abroad. Students and professors from HEIs are highly interested in opportunities for **virtual exchange programmes allowing cross-cultural interaction and collaboration** among students and other stakeholders. The pandemic has also taught HEIs a valuable lesson that strategic plans for **distance-learning are essential in times of crises**.

"This (digital education) should only be part of the solution for real cooperation. Digitally, institutions in the south are on par with those in the North. The real step would be true physical mobility of researchers without any obstacles to mobility."

President of Habitat World, Italy

²⁹ ARCWH - Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage (ARC-WH) under the auspices of UNESCO

Increasing internationalisation at home includes organisation of **online meetings that can encourage international participation** for example as well as making online courses available in different languages to promote internationalisation of resources and programs.

Encouraging digital readiness for the future

There is clearly a need for supporting digital education in today's time and even more importantly for the future. Our societies are becoming more and more reliant on technology in different sectors and fields. HEIs need to **promote training for students, teachers and citizens.**

"...Europe will lose its competitive edge of a highly-skilled and educated workforce, if we fail to teach digital competences to our peoples of all ages. We need to strengthen children's and young people's critical thinking skills and media literacy."

Malta Further and Higher Education Authority

HEIs must also consider **integrating digitalisation in their pedagogy for a systematic approach** while creating the space and establishing policies that support digital education for systematic approaches that **well-integrate digital education** rather than considering it as a separate subject or field.

The systematic integration of digital education in HEIs can be used for effective teaching which would at the same time enhance the development of students' digital skills. Integrated digital education can be used to create an **enhanced teaching and learning experience** through technologies such as **virtual and augmented reality**. HEIs can promote **blended university training models** that seek digital technology at the service of learning (blended mobility option in Erasmus+, for example). The typical use of technology today for scanning through large amounts of information and identifying patterns can serve useful for HEIs in identifying important educational topics and give ideas on how HEIs can approach these issues via programs and curricula.

Incentivising through policy to promote digital education

Development of clear strategies and policies for integrating digital education into curricula can lead to the **prioritisation of advancing digital education** and its use as a tool and field in HEIs. In order for digital education to be implemented, **guidelines** from HEIs are needed. Policies and regulations by HEIs ensure the proper support and implementation of e-Learning programs and approaches. Among the different uses and benefits of digital education is the use of technologies for **automatisation of assessment and evaluation processes for increased reliability and transparency**. Policies put in place to support technology in administrative processes could lead their facilitation and in turn also **reduce bureaucratic obstacles**.

Ensuring legal, ethical and moral guarantees

Implications that come with the use of technology and digital education must be considered by HEIs. How HEIs will deal with **protection of private and personal data and the rights of users** in the digital education process is a major aspect. With the implementation of digital education, **core values need to be embedded, taught and respected** by all HEI leaders, staff and students. While digital technology provides several advantages and benefits, how HEIs use it with on-site education must be considered.

Complementary contributions from the UfM Higher Education Stakeholders' Meeting, 17 March 2023, Alicante, Spain

- Competition between online and on-site must be stopped: education technologies should be a way to expand opportunities for learning. **The future is hybrid.**
- **Develop critical thinking:** whether online or on-site is not the question. Education and technology should have been seen as hybrid tools to a quality education.
- Understand how technology will transform and improve education. Digital education is more about people, interactions and mindsets, not just technology.



Digital Education Summary Points

1. **Investing in and adapting to new technologies** and improving infrastructure for digital education.
2. **Sharing online tools and platforms** for peer-learning and sharing of resources and information.
3. Building capacity through **regular training of staff** on digital education and literacy and digital transformation.
4. Supporting digital readiness for the future by **promoting digital skills training for citizens and faculty staff and students** as well as integrating digitisation in university pedagogy.
5. Establishing **joint online programs** for digital education (like MOOC).
6. Increasing access to programs and curricula and internationalisation at home through **distance learning and virtual exchange programs**.
7. Enhancing development of student digital skills by **integrating digital education in teaching**, as well as creating an enhanced learning and teaching experience.
8. **Developing clear strategies and policies** for integrating digital education into curricula.
9. Avoiding competition between online and on-site - **the future is hybrid**.

Governance

There is wide acknowledgement among survey respondents that the **discrepancy in higher education systems** in the Euro-Mediterranean HEIs is a **barrier for collaboration**. Not only is there a discrepancy in the education system itself, but **inequalities of benefits between countries** on each side of the Mediterranean exist and some HEIs in different countries **lack quality assurance mechanisms**. There is also a **clear preference for mobility** from countries in the South of the Mediterranean to North Mediterranean countries which is leading to a **brain drain** from the South. Effective, strong and trusted leadership requires **good governance practices** and high **quality assurance**, qualities that are missing in governance of some HEIs. Importantly, for change to occur, **leaders must be motivated and dedicated** to improvement and development of the region, something believed by respondents not to be the case in some Euro-Mediterranean countries. The subsections below summarise the main suggestions and solutions provided in the survey as a means of tackling the aforementioned challenges.

Role of governance

A major role of governance in HEIs is the **support and effective leadership** it must provide. Governance support comes through establishing collaborations with Euro-Mediterranean and international HEIs for the goal of **knowledge transfer and capacity building**. The role of governance is both “internal” and “external”. Internal support for HEIs through the **pooling of resources and expertise** as well as **encouraging good management and cooperation of staff**. External support of governance to HEIs includes the **alignment of higher education strategies with regional development objectives**. It is important that HEI governance **motivates and ensures transparency and accountability** of university network activities. Governance should also support **diplomatic approaches and strengthening of alliances**. With the Cairo Declaration, there needs to be a renewed commitment and a corresponding allocation of resources by governments and the higher education sectors on both shores of the Euro-Mediterranean.

Contribution from Stakeholder meeting, 17 March 2023, Alicante, Spain

There is a need to improve several aspects of HEI including diversification, democratisation, quality of research, start-ups, digitalisation, innovation, startups, structural changes and employability. Some HEIs have a legal framework to support these processes. The following are points for targeting HEI governance:

- Increase social actions: peace, security, consideration of immigration and social security are important for the stability of the region. If universities cannot cooperate and improve integration of refugees, there is no logic in talking about the Mediterranean agenda.
- Creation of an Observatory of the Human and Social Sciences; some disciplines that require collaboration.
- Policies for including women and training for transformative leadership for women are needed to ensure there is no imbalance of powers. Governance strategies for encouraging women leadership for gender inclusion in the region must be put in place.

Enhancing stakeholder inclusivity

It is in the interest of governance to ensure all stakeholders are included prior to the implementation of changes. Citizen engagement is therefore essential for good governance. Governance needs to promote the engagement and participation of all key stakeholders including HEI faculty staff, students and employees for informing HEIs and governance on needs of the sector. Citizen engagement is essential for good governance as it is a major stakeholder in informing governance of needs of the region

which can drive the alignment of the educational system. Good and effective governance must encourage bottom-up approaches in order to gather new initiatives allowing the prioritisation of industry and investment. Education of citizens is crucial for the development of countries. It is the role of governance to ensure that education is made accessible and available for everyone, without boundaries of race, religion, gender etc...

“Encourage stakeholder engagement: Promoting the engagement of key stakeholders, including students, faculty, and employers, in the governance of higher education institutions, with a focus on ensuring that the needs and perspectives of these groups are taken into account.”

Lebanese International University, Lebanon

The discrepancy in education systems at the national and international level needs to be taken into account by HEIs in order for effective collaboration and development to take place. Governance needs to put in place **guidelines** on how HEIs ensure the **alignment of interests and common goals** to motivate continuous national and international collaboration.

Improving quality assurance

Without quality assurance, credibility and legitimacy of HEIs can be at risk, thus highlighting **the need for supporting high standards of HEI quality assurance**. One approach is the **development and implementation of common quality assurance and evaluation standards for HEIs**. The development of a joint Euro-Mediterranean accreditation system for HEIs or a joint Mediterranean framework for quality assurance in HEIs could be one such approach. Another approach is **the support of the reform of processes in each country** in order to **redefine the credit and qualification recognition system** leading to the creation of a national reference framework for HEIs. Improved quality assurance can be supported through fostering innovative initiatives as well as the use of new technology and methodology to enhance quality of HEIs.

Training leadership

Capacity building of HEIs for leadership requires a system that provides **training of essential skills, retains talent and fosters professional development of staff**. In order for leadership to set optimal goals for HEIs, there needs to be a **strong and visionary leadership** that is capable

of responding to complex changes and driving social transformation. Increasing the efficiency and competence of leadership to fulfil these goals calls for a set of required skills for governing bodies.

Peer-learning

Through peer-learning and sharing of best practices, **different methods and approaches of improved governance can be shared**. Governance models, for example, can use **evaluation exercises based on or inspired from existing ones** like the University Governance Screening Card (UGSC)³⁰ by the World Bank or the United Nations Office for Project Services/Center Mediterranean Integration (UNOPS/CMI)³¹ or learn from the Bologna process³² on **best practices for HEI internationalisation**.

Individual capacity building must be encouraged within HEIs. One approach for building individual capacity can come through exchange between HEI representatives. While inter-HEI communication and sharing of best practices can be highly useful, civil **society are key stakeholders** and can provide helpful information to HEI governance. Collaborations between civil society and HEIs allows for exchange of knowledge and experience that can then be integrated into the curricula.

Enhancing governance models

Methods of enhancing governance models can depend on the goals of HEIs at the regional or national scale. **Models for governance can be identified and established as best-fit for the region or through the unification of regional governance models**. Establishing either of these governance models highly depends on the regional vision and goals. Most importantly, whatever governance is finally chosen, **good governance through transparency and ethical conduct is crucial**. Best practices for achieving transparency and ethical conduct can be identified through partnership and collaboration with other HEI governance. With complex issues of today's world, governance must encourage building **innovative, resilient and socially-committed HEIs**.

³⁰ “Middle East and North Africa (MENA) governments engaged in governance reforms have had university governance reform on their agenda for some time. In an effort to respond to this issue, in 2011, the Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI) and the World Bank launched the University Governance Screening Card (UGSC), with the aim of supporting governance and accountability reforms”.

³¹ Strengthened Cooperation with the CMI-UNOPS - CIHEAM

³² The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area | European Education Area (europa.eu)

Reducing bureaucracy

Due to the diversity and large quantity of administrative processes at HEIs, the **automatisation of certain processes** can be an approach for increased efficiency and transparency. Moreover, the overload in bureaucracy at HEIs may cause delays and obstacles in project progression.

Increasing academic autonomy

Governance must support academic autonomy of HEIs for stronger strategic planning and improved quality of education. This must also come by allowing HEIs to identify and establish the best fit model of academic autonomy as deemed correct. Modes for academic autonomy and freedom can be improved through regional initiatives for sharing of knowledge and experiences.

"Cooperation could focus on setting-up structuring projects aimed at getting universities to choose the model of autonomy they wish to pursue by referring to the reference system of the Union of European Universities and to build their own path towards this autonomy which is essential to evolve in this dominant context of New Public Management without losing their specificities."

Manouba University, Tunisia

Complementary contributions from the UfM Higher Education Stakeholders' Meeting, 17 March 2023, Alicante, Spain

- **Respect the separation of power:** give power to the central authorities in order to provide more autonomy to HEIs. Bureaucratic changes in some countries ended up being inefficient, something that should be avoided. Governance of institutions have to respect the separation of powers and **find a just equilibrium between the different levels**. There is a need to **adapt governance of HEIs** in the (Euro-)Mediterranean area: reinforce governance at a national level for reform but also involve governance at a regional level through sharing of good and bad practices and how to improve HEI amongst countries. Southern countries prefer to discuss with northern countries rather than South. Regional initiatives for governance, for example, mobility programmes are lacking in the southern Mediterranean.
- **Find a degree of academic freedom;** there are important problems related to academic freedom. There is a need to work at the regional and international level. HEIs need to have a **charter on social responsibility** to harmonise the ethical relations, and guarantee an economic environment that is positive for the region. HEIs also have to strengthen the regional dimension for more collaboration and social responsibility.



Governance Summary Points

1. **Widening participation in strategic planning** by promoting the engagement of teaching staff, students and employees, and also societal stakeholders in informing governance and strategy of Higher Education Institutions.
2. **Supporting staff of Higher Education Institutions through capacity building** and provide training to ensure retaining of talent and fostering of professional development.
3. Using governance to support knowledge transfer and capacity building by **establishing collaborations** with Mediterranean universities and having regular thematic meetings.
4. Encouraging the development of **strong and visionary leadership** that is able to respond to complex challenges and drive social transformation.
5. Identifying and **establishing best-fit models** for governance.
6. Supporting development and implementation of **common quality assurance and evaluation standards** in Higher Education Institutions.
7. Promoting good governance, transparency and ethical conduct through **partnership and collaboration**.
8. Aligning Higher Education strategies with **regional development objectives**.
9. Establishing a separation of power and allowing **academic autonomy**.
10. Avoiding leadership imbalance of power due to inequalities of **gender inclusion in leadership**.

Inclusion, including the gender dimension

Higher Education is still not accessible to everyone in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The expressions of challenges are unmatched among respondents from different regions. Southern Mediterranean countries give more concrete examples and needs, while Northern countries tend to appeal and reaffirm values. **Gender-related issues are the most mentioned and shared between both areas**, while there is a general achievement on the advocacy for respecting race and religion in reducing inequalities in higher education institutions (HEIs)

through the region in the past years. To promote **diversity, equity, and inclusion is a continuous effort and should be integrated in the whole process of education**. However, it is both important and difficult to identify the specific needs of marginalised individuals and groups, integrating equality in all aspects of HEIs, such as professional posts, mobility, retention, and promotion of talent, leadership, research, learning, and lifelong learning. On the other hand, the need for **inclusive internationalisation** is also raised as an important challenge and provides an opportunity to work on this important topic alongside other aspects of cooperation in higher education within the region.

Complementary contributions from the UfM Higher Education Stakeholders' Meeting, 17 March 2023, Alicante, Spain

In the 21st century, sustainability alone is insufficient; inclusivity and diversity are essential social values and human rights that contribute to social resilience. Achieving the SDGs depends on promoting diversity, and without it, progress towards the SDGs is hindered. HEIs have a critical role to play in promoting social change.

- Many HEIs still have a gender bias in top management and senior positions, which perpetuates inequality in research, education, and innovation. This bias reflects a cultural problem in HEIs that must be addressed.
- Interdisciplinary and systems thinking: a social change requires us to see the system as a whole to be able to succeed.

Support for minority groups

A more inclusive and diverse higher education system requires the promotion of equity, equal opportunities, and the participation of vulnerable groups and minorities. This can be achieved by removing barriers to higher education and developing processes to **allow refugees to become either students or staff at Euro-Mediterranean universities**. A common program among Mediterranean countries could be developed to provide assistance to refugees, including the development of university corridors. Another example is **addressing harassment and discrimination in higher education and providing support to victims**. Inclusion of elderly individuals and people with special needs in education policies and processes is also necessary. Moreover, extensive student support programs should be promoted **for disadvantaged groups in Erasmus+** and their participation in the program reinforced.

The inclusion of the elderly or people with special needs in the education policies of all UfM countries and to provide institutions with measures for accessibility and real inclusion of this population.

National School of Architecture of Oujda, Morocco

To ensure that **no one is left behind**, particular attention should be paid to **cultural and social minority groups**. Flexible access to higher education, such as continuing education or lifelong learning opportunities, recognition of prior learning, and providing apprenticeships, can support those from disadvantaged backgrounds, including refugees and students living in remote or rural areas. **Scholarships, funding, and incentives** can also be provided to promote opportunities for them.

Use role models and best practices as inspiration

HEIs can exchange good practice, promote successful experiences, and initiate efficient activities to **increase awareness**. Encouraging inclusion can be achieved by **recognising and honouring institutions or individuals who have demonstrated a commitment to inclusion** and have taken action to create more inclusive environments. This can include institutions or individuals **who have implemented policies or practices to support diversity, equity, and inclusion, or who have shown leadership in advocating for underrepresented groups**. Awards or prizes could also be given to recognise their achievements.

On the other hand, highlighting the **profiles of female decision-makers** from the North and South can help promote the importance of inclusion. Finally, to further support inclusion, **mentorship programmes and leadership programmes can be established for women in higher education**. These programmes can provide a supportive learning environment and encourage participation in inclusion-driven programmes.

The most important challenge in the field of gender equality in Tunisia, for example, is not so much access to education as access to employment and especially to positions of responsibility. In addition to the change in national cultures that will eventually come about through education, the setting up of projects for training in women's leadership, the creation of networks and the highlighting and mediatization of the profiles of women decision-makers from countries in the North and South could inspire girls more and encourage them to take up this type of career.

Manouba University, Tunisia

Create mechanism to detect, understand and resolve needs

To provide a space for exchange on the topic, some HEIs, like the University of Sousse, have established a gender unit³³ to provide guidance

and support on gender issues. These universities also aim to build **a national and international network to disseminate their activities and participate in international projects related to gender equality** in higher education.

Encouraging **dialogue on gender issues** can be realised through regular conferences and workshops, both at policy-makers level and stakeholders. Such events provide opportunities for stakeholders, including students and teachers, to exchange ideas and best practices on promoting gender equality and inclusion in higher education, and **let their voices be heard by the policy-makers**.

Importantly, conducting **a study on the conditions of women in higher education systems in southern Mediterranean countries** can provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by women and inform targeted interventions to promote gender equality.

Complementary contributions from the UfM Higher Education Stakeholders' Meeting, 17 March 2023, Alicante, Spain

- **Set agency** for active members to implement gender equality plans doing community practices: need to **involve all parties**. Cooperation for students to really learn and share their experience to teach the **younger generations**.
- Networking for co-learning and sharing of experiences to inspire other members and make spill-over effects.
- **Mentoring** both for competent gender leadership and young people with **soft skills**, like new mental models and emotions, communication and compassion, commitment and courage.

Integrate gender dimension into regulations

To further promote equality and inclusion, **policies and initiatives need to be updated** to ensure they are effective in addressing current challenges, for instance, several institutions or organisations advocate for gender equality in higher education at the EU policy level.

Legislation can be improved to allocate gender-quota for events such as workshops or

³³ <https://uso.rnu.tn/static/actualites/ODD5.pdf>

conferences, ensuring that there is equal representation and participation. In addition, **incentives and support measures** can be put in place to give marginalised groups of individuals access to internationalisation opportunities.

To ensure gender equality is embedded within higher education, **gender-sensitive policies and programs need to be implemented**. These can include efforts aimed at increasing the representation of women in leadership positions and promoting gender equality in the classroom. Mentorship and leadership programs should be established to support women in higher education.

It is also crucial to improve gender equality in professional posts, mobility, retention, and promotion of talent, leadership, research, learning, and post-training. A way to make it possible is to provide support and resources to increase the participation of women in higher education. This could include the provision of extensive student support programs, such as grants, salary grants, and social aid.

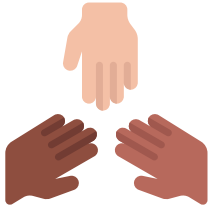
research to promote inclusivity and also actively implement tailored programs designed to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds in developing essential skills, including soft skill, and professional skills. Gender-inclusive perspectives can be actively integrated into their curricula to challenge gender stereotypes and promote greater understanding of gender-related issues. Encouraging and incentivising programs, such as scholarships, awards, and media coverage, can actively inspire young girls to pursue higher education. Very importantly, an inclusive internationalisation and a dialogue on migration issues need to be fostered by HEIs in the Mediterranean region, **allowing students to develop into responsible, solidary and global citizens**.

Complementary contributions from the UfM Higher Education Stakeholders' Meeting, 17 March 2023, Alicante, Spain

- Make gender equality plans that **focus on governance, career development, teaching innovation**, and research and put them into actions.
- **Assess the policies**, gender equality plans, mechanisms promoted by the Commission.
- **Commit the institution leaders and provide investment in human and financial resources** to create the structure and assessment framework, and then assessing and monitoring these processes.

Make courses more inclusive

To enhance access to programs and curricula, HEIs can actively offer specific training and aid for people with special needs and make programs and curricula more accessible. In addition, they can take the initiative to **organise and finance international courses for persons with disabilities**, such as blind people, to offer equal learning opportunities. HEIs can actively **integrate a gender dimension into teaching** and



Inclusion, including the gender dimension Summary Points

1. **Improving accessibility to Higher Education and making it flexible**, meeting different needs of different groups of the public.
2. **Updating policies and initiatives of inclusion**, integrating the entire education process and identifying the **specific needs of marginalised individuals and groups**.
3. **Using interdisciplinary and systems thinking** to address the cultural problem.
4. **Exchanging good practices, offering specific training and aid** to integrate gender dimension into teaching and research, and establishing mentorship programs for women in higher education. Networking and co-learning among members can inspire others and create spill-over effects.
5. **Conducting studies, and allocating gender-quota** for events, **integrating gender dimension in regulations, curricula**, and also as **pre-requirement** for scholarships, funding, grants or incentives.
6. **Setting agency for active members** to implement gender equality plans and involve all parties, including students, to teach and share their experiences.
7. **Providing assistance, opportunities and resources to refugees, cultural and social minority groups**, as well as **victims of harassment and discrimination**.
8. **Requiring commitment of institution leaders and investment in human and financial resources** for creating the structure and assessment framework.
9. **Launching programs of continuing education or lifelong learning** as well as enhance **recognition of prior learning and apprenticeships** to improve accessibility to Higher Education and make it flexible, meeting different needs of different groups of the public.

Greening/Sustainable Development

Achieving sustainable development goals and positive impact within and for the region requires a **holistic approach and strong collaboration of HEIs in the Euro-Mediterranean** for sustainability, which does not yet exist among UfM State Members. The **curricula and tools** of many HEIs are **not yet fully adapted** to train students and researchers on how to tackle and work on global and complex problems. Not all HEIs have the **resources and funding** to support research in sustainability and implementation of sustainable solutions.

Integrating sustainability into curricula and training

Ideally, **sustainability needs to be integrated in all thinking and approaches** in different subjects of education and societal development. In order to do so, HEIs must avoid sustainability being regarded as a separate practice that is integrated actively into each subject. Rather, a **cross-cutting approach** to sustainability in HEI is required in order to ensure sustainability is truly integrated. Placing modules, seminars and programs on sustainability and SDGs into the curricula as well as extracurricular activities. Principles of sustainability must also be integrated at the level of HEIs. **Courses on sustainable development and ecology** can be made available in all training, including for civil servants. Sustainable education can also be supported through initiatives for greening and through supporting institutions in sustainability in developing countries.

Complementary contributions from the UfM Higher Education Stakeholders' Meeting, 17 March 2023, Alicante, Spain

- Programs: what kind of programs should HEIs have? Unlike other education systems prior to higher education, HEIs are treating disciplines in isolation. The complexity of issues needs **interdisciplinary programs, a flagship for HEIs for sustainability**.
- Collaboration among and between academic staff through the development of training and enhancing skills for collaboration between academics and

employees. Talk about actions is needed through more flexible and open courses that connect academia to the industry.

- Publish or perish culture is harmful, research work must have an impact on society. This is a need to closely align HEI and research to societal needs; a need to collaborate with social actors.

Engaging in sustainability

How HEIs engage in topics of sustainability can be an important aspect in promoting the sustainability mindset not only of HEIs but the local and regional society as well. Engagement can be done through **adopting sustainable practices into the actual functions and operations of HEIs**, by placing SDGs and greening topics in their research program and by integrating community service opportunities into the curricula, allowing students to gain experience through **volunteer work and civic engagement**. Development of partnerships between HEIs and NGOs or community groups is an approach for opening opportunities for student engagement.

Strengthening partnership and sustainability actions among HEIs in the region can come through the prioritisation of climate-related urgent issues for the Euro-Mediterranean, such as pollution and biodiversity of the Mediterranean Sea. Importantly, HEIs also play a role in promoting the concept of social responsibility of universities in tackling climate-related issues.

"Integration of (SDG) into the curricula/programs and extra-curricular activities; moving away from description and teaching to practice and experience."

**University College
of Applied Sciences, Palestine**

Capacity building of stakeholders for impact

Ideally, HEIs can promote **regular events that provide opportunities for stakeholders to exchange ideas and best practices**. National and regional stakeholders can have a loud voice and therefore HEI can help in training some stakeholders to support the development of organisations in establishing and strengthening their role in sustainable development. Efficient results through **direct involvement** of stakeholders such as local academic and educational organisations to achieve more efficient results in the developing sector

Reducing carbon footprint through concrete ideas

Countries of the Euro-Mediterranean region face similar climate-change issues. It is therefore important that the **valorisation and preservation of wild species unknown in the Euro-Mediterranean region is carried out**. HEIs play a role in this for bringing the correct and most updated information as well as the best methods to do so. HEIs can also play a role in encouraging and supporting sustainable practices for agriculture and transport. Promoting **resource efficiency and tools for measuring and tracking carbon footprint in HEIs** are strong examples of action for HEIs to set sustainability goals.

Including SDGs and greening into strategic plans and policies

The global momentum towards sustainability and greening comes as a result of prioritising SDGs due to otherwise even more drastic consequences since there are limited non-renewable resources, climate change, etc... Placing **SDGs as a key item in the agenda and policy priorities** of HEIs in the Mediterranean is crucial, and **joint charters on SDGs** can be written between HEIs to enforce approaches and goals. Prioritising SDGs through **strategic plans** such as establishing collaborations between HEIs and different sectors of industry encourages the development of products and services in areas of climate change and healthy living. An assessment of the current situation of different HEIs of the Mediterranean in following the UN Agenda 2030 for SDGs³⁴ is useful in order to know how to go forward and what projects to propose.

Complementary contributions from the UfM Higher Education Stakeholders' Meeting, 17 March 2023, Alicante, Spain

The biggest challenge in HEI is not just how to integrate sustainability, it is also understanding **how learning and capacity for sustainability** can be achieved?

There is also the question of quality of education: one challenge is to decide what type of education and what type of institutions are wanted. Is the institution an instrumental one? Or should youth be invested in as free and critical thinkers who are useful for society. It would be interesting to know how to identify these issues under HEI.

The role of HEI in sustainability: the whole institution approach/holistic approach which is a critical term; there is a need to understand the complexity of the character of the issues and problems. **HEIs are not there just to produce knowledge, they bring the leaders of tomorrow**, they are organisations of a community of learning. There is a need to reconsider the infrastructure since the campus is critical (creating green campuses for example).

Research collaboration and partnership for sustainability

The shared climate of the Mediterranean region calls for **sharing common goals among UfM State Members**. Addressing common challenges in sustainability and environment should be optimised through **facilitating cross-border research collaboration and motivating joined research interdisciplinary projects for sustainable development**. HEIs can best learn from each other's experiences, resources and best practices. Developing a **framework** to enable this communication can help achieve these conversations. Advancing HEIs in targeting sustainability issues also requires **research cooperation both on the national and international level**. Partnerships between HEIs and local communities can prove useful to support sustainable development projects. An example could be the **twinning of "sustainable campuses" and exchange of good practices**.

³⁴ THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development (un.org)

Partnership with industry in tackling sustainable development is also crucial and can be motivated through **collaborations between HEI and industries of different sectors**. Many issues of sustainability and the environment require different approaches, there could be a need for developing specific academies adapted to needs for targeting certain issues.

Updating policies and guidelines with greening

For putting in place concrete and effective actions, it is important that **HEI policies and guidelines are up-to-date**, this includes the 2020 handbook which should integrate green skills development. Creating **a common vision and path towards greening and sustainability goals** can be encouraged by placing the Green/Blue agenda of the Euro-Mediterranean at the core of sustainable initiatives in the region. Effective action plans and initiatives ideally require a strategic program with goals of sustainability.

"We would welcome an update of the 2020 mapping and research Reinforcing the Innovation-Employability Nexus in the Mediterranean – A Handbook for Academia, Industry and Policymakers with the lens of green skills development."

Paeradigms, Estonia

Aspects to take into account for implementation

Solutions for greening and sustainability come at certain costs that must be considered prior to their implementation. There is also the need to consider the **disparities that exist in methods and approaches for greening projects and initiatives**. Increasing the efficiency of the work and approaches can be done through establishing a network where discussion of issues and finding solutions are focused on climate and environmental issues. It is possible that HEIs provide incentives to encourage long term environmental commitment.



Greening/Sustainable Development Summary Points

1. Promoting a **cross-cutting approach** for integrating SDGs and climate-related topics in curricula and training in HEIs.
2. Encouraging **community service, volunteer work** and **civic engagement and partnerships with NGOs and community groups** to address pressing issues.
3. Including **SDGs as a key item in the agenda and policy priorities** for organisations and Higher Education Institutions.
4. Facilitating and supporting **cross-border and interdisciplinary research collaboration** to address common challenges related to sustainability and the environment.
5. Encouraging finding of sustainable solutions through **academic-industry partnering**.
6. Putting in place **programmes and initiatives in favour of sustainability**.

Fundamental Academic Values

Most of the respondents on the fundamental academic values in the Euro-Mediterranean region identified overcoming cultural and systemic barriers as the primary challenge. These barriers encompass differences in educational systems, political and social norms, and historical legacies that shape attitudes and behaviours towards academic values. Based on the respondents' opinions, a comprehensive approach is necessary, which includes engaging in dialogue, building trust and relationships, and developing institutional structures and policies. While there is agreement on the importance of academic values, the challenge lies in implementing them in practice, requiring ongoing reflection, evaluation, and improvement. To address this challenge, practical strategies and tools for implementation and a culture of accountability and continuous improvement must be fostered. The fundamental academic values raised amongst the response can be classified into these 6 main categories. The following bullet points give a few examples of how values were raised in the public consultation:

1. Freedom and autonomy

- Academic freedom
- Freedom of expression
- Freedom in research
- Institutional autonomy
- University autonomy / Independence

2. Ethics, scientific integrity and social responsibility

- Scientific integrity / Ethics in research / anti-plagiarism
- Respect for the ecological environment / Social responsibility / Sustainability and responsible stewardship of resources

3. Excellence, transparency and Openness

- Innovation and excellence in research and scholarship
- Effectiveness and commitment in academic work
- Honesty and transparency and openness in academic endeavours
- Open access to knowledge

4. Diversity and inclusion:

- Tolerance of divergent opinions
- Cultural diversity
- Inclusion of all audiences and perspectives

- intercultural understanding
- Globalisation

5. Equality, justice and Human dignity

- Equality / Equity in access to education and resources
- Justice / Job security for academic professionals
- Non-discrimination
- Human rights and peace of the world

6. Solidarity and liability

- Cooperation between people / Solidarity and mutual support amongst academic communities
- Loyalty and liability to community within academia

Complementary contributions from the UfM Higher Education Stakeholders' Meeting, 17 March 2023, Alicante, Spain

Fundamental academic values are crucial for responsible creation and dissemination of scientific knowledge. HEIs play a key role in transmitting knowledge to society and contributing to progress through education, research, and innovation. The Manifesto for a Francophone Scientific Diplomacy³⁵ promotes inclusiveness, active solidarity, and equal access to knowledge for achieving the UN sustainable development agenda.

- **Collaborative, equitable, and ethical practices** are **key to excellence**, and can promote dialogue and learning. UfM members can work together to overcome asymmetry and unequal access to knowledge

Academic freedom is key to the pursuit of truth and the advancement of knowledge as well as the promotion of democracy and free speech. Academic freedom and academic values and ethics should be promoted, respected and protected in all Mediterranean countries.

Universitat de Girona, Spain

³⁵ <https://www.auf.org/nouvelles/actualites/le-manifeste-pour-une-diplomatie-scientifique-francophone-est-disponible>

Make a joint declaration or improve existing guidelines

Draft a collaborative statement regarding academic values, expand the scope of academic freedom within relevant regulations, and establish and enforce a code of ethics and conduct.

Include fundamental academic values into curricula

Develop joint curricula that align with fundamental academic values, including critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, and academic freedom. Include **a multidisciplinary topic on the human rights-based approach**, apply humanist values in all fields of activity, and promote new paradigms such as digital humanities and environmental humanism.

Establishment of mechanisms for dissemination, monitoring and assessment of issues related to academic value

Firstly, each country should appoint accessible and **cooperative student advisor** representatives to address any issues that may arise. Secondly, creating more platforms to highlight the central importance of core values in university life would be beneficial. Thirdly, participating HEIs should be encouraged to explicitly articulate their core values. Finally, measuring instruments should be developed to **evaluate the extent to which core values** have been instilled in faculty, students, and alumni. Additionally, measuring tools can be created for faculty, students, and alumni to evaluate the success of HEIs in promoting core values.

Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in the field of higher education must be underpinned by values and a sense of responsibility by those involved in it. Especially, academic leadership should be accountable to both their institution and society at large.

**International Association
of Universities**

Additional Contributions from Stakeholder Meeting, 17 March 2023, Alicante, Spain.

- Encouraging participation and inclusion, promoting diversity and cooperation, and using effective learning methods can foster an environment for **self-reflection and constructive dialogue** in Euro-Mediterranean activities.
- **Respect for diverse languages and cultures** in the Euro-Med region is crucial.
- To strengthen values and ensure inclusivity, it is important to engage in **auto-reflection, constructive dialogue, and learning**, and to create **networks** with shared visions.



Academic Values Summary Points

1. Balancing the diverse educational systems enriched by geographical, cultural, economic, and historical perspectives with the common main challenges in terms of academic values in the region
2. Underpinning Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in the field of HE to the fundamental academic values
3. Producing a **joint declaration** and improve the existing **guidelines**
4. Including fundamental academic values into **curricula**
 - a. Develop joint curricula and educational programmes aligned to academic values
 - b. Integrate new paradigms: i.e. open science, environmental humanism
5. Establishing **mechanisms** focused on academic values in order to **promote**, **monitor** and **evaluate** them
6. Working together to overcome asymmetry in the region and unequal access to knowledge
 - a. **Promote respect** for diverse languages and cultures in the Euro-Med
 - b. Create **networks** with shared visions in concrete values
 - c. **Engage HEIs in auto-reflection**, constructive dialogue, and learning

Other areas to be prioritised : employability

When asked about other priorities which are not covered in the main areas of the survey, topics related to employability have emerged as a prominent issue in most of the answers, while other elements fitted in above-mentioned 6 themes. Employability in the very context of the survey not only refers to an individual's ability to find or maintain an employment, but also, more specifically, the readiness and suitability of the higher educational systems over the Mediterranean region for adapting or co-creating job opportunities. What's more, as indicated by many respondents, in today's rapidly evolving job market, technology and automation are changing the nature of work, thus employability is targeted as the most important issue concerning individuals, organisations and society as a whole. In many cases, employability is linked to factors like economic impact, research applicability, training, lifelong learning, quality of higher education, and engagement of both private and public sectors, and remains transversal with many other topics previously identified during the design of the survey. Overall, employability is this complex and multifaceted issue that is likely to remain as a key priority for individuals and organisations in the coming years in the Mediterranean region.

Let economic impact and regional needs shape employability

The region's assets are not being fully exploited due to limited investment in research and innovation, hindering HEIs' potential to contribute to economic and social development. This calls for a transition in education from studies to employment, with a focus on job-oriented projects such as YEP MED. **Increasing awareness of entrepreneurial needs and providing training can help bridge the gap.** However, applied research and generating patents for enterprises remain challenging areas in the southern MED region. To fully utilise the region's potential, there is a need for a stronger emphasis on innovation and entrepreneurship.

Complementary contributions from the UfM Higher Education Stakeholders' Meeting, 17 March 2023, Alicante, Spain

- Consider the need to **focus on employability along with skills and societal challenges.**
- Promote **collaboration between academic staff and industry through flexible and open courses** that facilitate the development of skills for training.
- The diversification of higher education institutions can lead to a democratisation of access to quality education and research, facilitating structural changes that support innovation and digitalisation. This, in turn, can enhance the creation of startups and improve employability opportunities for graduates. Democratisation, quality of research, start-ups, digitalisation, Innovation, startups, structural changes and employability.

Adapt higher education to job market and the future

It is crucial to reform the system to ensure that the **skills and knowledge imparted align with the needs of the rapidly evolving job market.** **Lifelong learning** has become more important than ever, as it allows individuals to continuously develop their skills and stay up-to-date with the latest trends and technologies. Another way to address the challenge of employability is to expose students to international experiences, which can provide them with a broader perspective and a competitive edge in the job market. Another issue is that students often leave higher education without the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in their chosen careers. Therefore, it is essential to increase **training for occupational skills** and raise awareness of the skills that can be transferred from university to the workforce. Reinforcing entrepreneurship and creating **links between vocational education and training and higher education** are also crucial for increasing youth employability.

Complementary contributions from the UfM Higher Education Stakeholders' Meeting, 17 March 2023, Alicante, Spain

- **Job market issues also need a critical point of view:** consider creating and maximising a **knowledge-based economy** in order to require the market to readapt to education, thus, **to require sponsorship from industry itself**, not just from ministries.
- **Job market needs cooperation:** make sure that the declaration has a paragraph on **how this cooperation would benefit different sectors**, like the economic sector.

Improve education and trainings to strengthen employability

The basis for improving the youth/graduate labour market prospects is the **practical and applied training**, such as dual training, work placements, service learning in close collaboration with other players. Higher education institutions should cooperate in entrepreneurship and create training programs such as work integrated learning, internships, and career development workshops. The university curricula, thus, should pay more attention to occupational skills and transferable skills, as well as human and social skills to teach professions of the future. **The other function of the HEI contributing to the employability is the life-long learning opportunities such as skilling, re-skilling, up-skilling, micro-credentials, and professional retraining should be provided to develop competences and deep knowledge.** Concrete actions can be taken along with the internalisation process of these institutions, for example, targeting skills development through international traineeships, both physical and blended, to meet the demands of a changing labour market and make relevant connections across borders.

"Young people can face difficult choices, as they often leave education without the right mix of skills and attitudes to succeed in a changing labour market. Many will face unemployment, underemployment, informal and precarious work, and even pressure to migrate with all the risks that this entails."

**International Association
of Universities**

Complementary contributions from the UfM Higher Education Stakeholders' Meeting, 17 March 2023, Alicante, Spain

- Other concrete efforts concerning employability need to be poured into:
- Supporting job opportunities and career centres, international internships, which already are available within the Erasmus+ framework and **need to be further developed in the Mediterranean context.**
- Introducing and **supporting the development, implementation and recognition of micro-credential** to support labour-market-related and employment-related education in the region.

Embrace new approaches to impulse employability

Integrating vocational training into higher education can help bridge the gap between education and the rapidly evolving job market. **Constructing pathways between formal and non-formal education**, such as global education, and experiential learning through volunteering and civic engagement can enhance the educational experience and prepare students for the challenges of the future.

Widening participatory approaches and engaging students and alumni in the development of academic partnerships and networks can help foster a greater sense of community and involvement in the academic world, as well as promote innovation and creativity. By involving students and alumni in these partnerships, institutions can benefit from their unique perspectives and experiences, while also providing them with valuable opportunities

for networking and professional development. This participatory approach can help ensure that higher education remains relevant and adaptable to the needs of students and society as a whole.

Let private-public partnership reinforce employability

Connecting private and public sectors into partnerships across the Mediterranean can help to promote innovation, competitiveness, and employability. Higher education institutions need to work closely with industrial and productive sectors, leading to the emergence of a Euro-Med academic hub that is in tune with sectoral changes and development challenges.

Private-public partnerships can reinforce employability by combining the resources, expertise, and networks of both sectors. The proposed models for these partnerships **include innovation clusters, incubators, and accelerator programs to foster job creation and entrepreneurship.**

To guarantee the success of these partnerships, **a Euro-Mediterranean TVET network should be established to exchange best practices.** Joint entrepreneurship programs and career centres can also support the development of students' skills and the creation of startups. By integrating vocational training in higher education and promoting research and **knowledge transfer between academia and industry,** the Euro-Mediterranean region can work **towards a modern, dynamic, and quality higher education system** that responds to the needs of the rapidly evolving job market.

Employability Summary Points

1. Reinforcing employability through private-public partnership to better support dynamism and adaptation to change
 - a. Using **innovation clusters and incubators as a lever for territorial development**
 - b. Improving **practical and applied training, i.e. dual training, work placements, service learning, etc.**
 - c. Promote **collaboration between academic staff and industry through flexible and open courses** that facilitate the development of skills, cooperative training programs for professional career, work-integrated learning programs, internships, and career development workshops.
2. Relying on networks to bring together institutions, industry, and government to exchange best practices, share resources, and collaborate on research initiatives that align with the needs of the labour market
 - a. **Make sure that the declaration has a paragraph on how this cooperation would benefit different sectors, like the economic sector.**
3. Not only considering teaching graduates and youth more qualified skills and knowledge adapted to the rapidly evolving job market but also **taking into account the societal transferable skills, students' digital entrepreneurial as well as international and intercultural competence**, i.e. impulsing international internships, which already are available within the Erasmus+ framework, in the Mediterranean context.
4. Considering creating and maximising a **knowledge-based economy in order to require the market to readapt to education**, thus, to require sponsorship from industry itself, not just from ministries.
5. Constructing **pathways between formal and non-formal education** and experiential learning:
 - a. Reinforcing **links between vocational education and training** and Higher Education.
 - b. **Diversifying and democratising the access to quality education.**
 - c. Introducing and supporting the development, implementation and **recognition of micro-credential** to support labour-market-related and employment-related education
 - d. **Supporting a regional initiative on the recognition of skills and qualification**

6 Conclusion and follow-up

In conclusion of the public consultation, the suggestions for improving Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in the field of Higher Education are based on the following transversal challenges:

1. **Asymmetry, non-alignment and unequal distribution of resources amongst member states**, which stems particularly from the diverse social, economic and political conditions of each country: it makes up the richness of the Mediterranean, but may also hinder cooperation on equal footing.
2. **Asymmetry and unequal distribution of opportunities within member states**, which especially is about making higher education more inclusive and providing access to opportunities (of internationalisation, but also general higher education or leadership) to people from all layers of society and regions from the country, but also to a more varied range of institutions.
3. **Administrative and financial barriers to cooperation and mobility** appear amongst the major challenges identified, as those are essential preconditions for facilitation of internationalisation.
4. **Mediterranean dimension of higher education cooperation** is still a component which has to be identified, in order to promote a stronger common cause for collaboration for all stakeholders in the region and a more relevant approach to cooperation that addresses the specific needs and challenges of the region.
5. **Aligning education to job market needs** is still in need of improvement. It is however essential for ensuring that graduates are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the workforce.
6. **Lack of a common strategy, unified vision or leadership amongst stakeholders** still hinders cooperation and collaboration between higher education institutions, as those are the elements which will drive sustainable long-term cooperation.

The main suggestions which came out from the public consultation were the following:

1. **Reinforce common platforms**
Reinforcing common platforms has been seen as essential for enhancing cooperation

between higher education institutions. Common platforms provide opportunities for sharing knowledge, exchanging information, and collaborating on joint projects. By reinforcing common platforms, higher education institutions can work together more effectively and efficiently, which can help to improve internationalisation and the quality of education. Also they strengthen dialogue, intercultural competences and the development of a common language about joint challenges of the Mediterranean. Common platforms can include digital platforms for communication and collaboration, online databases for research and information sharing, and physical platforms for conferences, meetings, and other joint activities. Reinforcing these common platforms can help to foster a more collaborative and productive environment for higher education institutions.

2. **Promote regular networking opportunities and conferences through e.g. university networks**

The concrete benefits of the common platforms, mentioned above, lie also in their capacity to create networking opportunities and conferences, which are crucial for the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and experiences among professionals in higher education. Regular networking opportunities and conferences through university networks can provide a setting for professionals to connect and collaborate, share best practices, and learn from one another. Those are the basis for the development of innovative ideas, the creation of new partnerships, and the improvement of the quality of higher education.

3. **Support staff of Higher Education Institution through capacity building and training**

Higher Education Institutions require competent and skilled staff. Therefore, supporting them through capacity building and training is essential. Capacity building and training programs can help staff members to enhance their knowledge and skills, keep them updated with the latest developments in their respective fields, and enable them to deliver quality education to students.

4. Increase EU funding whilst reducing dependency on it

Funding from the European Union has been crucial for building and enhancing cooperation in higher education in the Euro-Mediterranean, especially through the International Credit Mobility. In this sense, the wish was expressed that the funding would increase, in order to raise in potency. However it also seemed important to reduce dependency on EU funding. Both wishes are partly in tension. Reducing dependency on EU funding can help higher education institutions to become more self-sufficient and sustainable in the long term. Therefore, it is essential to explore alternative sources of funding and to diversify the funding base to reduce reliance on EU funding.

5. Ensure compatibility and mutual recognition of degrees and qualifications

In an increasingly globalised world, it is essential to ensure that degrees and qualifications obtained from different higher education institutions are compatible and recognised across different countries. This can help to facilitate the mobility of students and professionals across borders, thereby enabling them to pursue their careers and educational goals. Therefore, it is important to ensure that degrees and qualifications obtained from different higher education institutions are mutually recognised and compatible.

6. Widen participation of underrepresented institutions and persons in cooperation

It is essential to ensure that cooperation is inclusive and accessible to underrepresented institutions and persons. Therefore, widening the participation of underrepresented institutions and persons in cooperation is crucial to ensuring that everyone has access to quality education and opportunities.

7. Adapt cooperation to regional social, economic and political conditions and needs

The social, economic, and political conditions of different regions can have a significant impact on higher education institutions. Therefore, it is essential to adapt cooperation to regional conditions and needs. This can help to ensure that cooperation is relevant,

responsive, and effective in addressing the specific challenges and opportunities of each region.

8. Leverage private-public partnerships to reinforce employability

Private-public partnerships can provide opportunities for higher education institutions to collaborate with private sector organisations to promote employability and address skills gaps in the labour market. Leveraging private-public partnerships can help to ensure that graduates are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in their chosen careers.

9. Support joint activities on core activities: Short mobilities and programs; Seminars on common challenges of the Euro-Mediterranean; Joint Research projects on common challenges

The concrete implementation of cooperation in higher education around the Mediterranean is vast. While top-down approaches will help structuring them, bottom-up approaches provide essential fruitful grounds for emergence of joint activities.

Annex 1: Questionnaire of the Public Consultation

1. Achievements and Challenges

What do you consider to be the biggest achievements and challenges of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in the field of Higher Education since 2007 and the Euro Med Declaration of Cairo?

2. Suggestions for the Future

Looking at the future, what are your suggestions as to how to boost Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in the field of higher education in the areas below? (It is not necessary to address all of them in your answer – you may choose to focus only on those of your interest)

- Digital Education
- Governance
- Internationalisation
- Inclusion, including the gender dimension
- Greening/Sustainable Development
- Fundamental academic values

3. Other Areas to be Prioritised

Are there any other areas that you consider should be prioritised in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in the field of Higher Education? Why? Please name also any concrete suggestions in those areas.

Annex 2: List of Public Consultation Respondents (institutional answers only)³⁶

Abdelmalek Essaadi University	Ecole Normale Supérieure de l'Enseignement / université Hassan II de Casablanca	Lebanese University	Universidade Lusófona	Université de la Manouba	Université Internationale de Rabat	Al Albayt University	University of Cyprus
Al Akhawayn University	ESITH Casablanca	Institut National de Recherche et d'Analyse Physico-Chimique	Universitat de Barcelona	Université de Monastir	University College of Applied Sciences	University of Tripoli	Palestine Technical University Kadoorie
Alexandria University	Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI)	Misurata University	Universitat de Girona	Université de Poitiers	University of Benghazi	An-Najah National University	University of Zawia
Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna	Lebanese American University	Mohamed Lamine Debaghine, Sétif 2 University	Université Chouaïb Doukkali	Université de Sousse	University of Derna	Arab American University	Ecole Nationale d'Architecture d'Oujda
Lebanese International University	Politecnico di Torino	UNIVERSITÉ DE CORSE	Université de Strasbourg	University of Granada	Saint Joseph University of Beirut	Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie	Téthys
Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport	BAU Global Education Network	International Association of Universities	UNIMED	Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI)	Erasmus Student Network	OCEANS	Center for Mediterranean Integration, UNOPS
Erasmus National Office Palestine	Paeradigms	Association Ouchrah pour la Culture et le développement	Association Solidarité Echange et Développement de la jeunesse (ASEDEJ)	HABITAT WORLD	HOMERE FRANCE	Mediterranean Youth Council	Hellenic Ministry of Education and religious affairs
Malta Further and Higher Education Authority	Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science	Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research	Ministère enseignement supérieur (Tunisie)	Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche Scientifique (Algérie)	Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche Scientifique et de l'Innovation (Maroc)		
Individual Higher Education Institution	Network of Higher Education Institutions	Network of Higher Education Students	Other	Other Civil Society Organisations	Public Authority or Agency		

³⁶ Only respondents who indicated they answer on behalf of their institution are listed here.

Annex 3: UfM Higher Education Stakeholders' Meeting, Casa Mediterráneo, Alicante, Spain, March 17th 2023

09.30 – 09.45, Welcome & Opening Remarks

Andrés Perelló Rodríguez, Director, Casa Mediterráneo

Filip Van Depoele, Deputy Director and Head of the International Cooperation Unit, Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC), European Commission

Álvaro Albacete, Deputy Secretary General in charge of Higher Education and Research, Union for the Mediterranean

09.45 – 10.05, Presentation of the results of the Public Consultation in view of a 1st UfM Ministerial Meeting on Higher Education

Filip Van Depoele, Deputy Director and Head of the International Cooperation Unit, Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC), European Commission

Yoran Beldengrün, Policy Consultant, SIRIS Academic

10.05 – 10.25, Achievements and challenges of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in the field of Higher Education since 2007 and the Euro-Med Declaration of Cairo

Mostapha Bousmina, President, Euromed University of Fez (UEMF)

Abdelhamid El-Zoheiry, President, Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI)

10.25 – 11.15, Session 1. Looking at the future: Internationalisation, Governance, Digital Education

Moderator: Itaf Ben Abdallah, Senior Advisor on Higher Education and Research, Union for the Mediterranean

Internationalisation / Mobility:

Giorgio Marinoni, Manager of Higher Education and Internationalisation, International Association of Universities

Juan Rayón, President, Erasmus Student Network (ESN)

Governance :

Marcello Scalisi, Director, Mediterranean Universities Union (UNIMED)

Digital Education:

Cristina Stefanelli, Project Manager, Mediterranean Universities Union (UNIMED)

Open Debate with all the participants

11.15 – 11.35, Coffee break

11.35 – 12.20, Session 2. Looking at the future: Education for Sustainable Development, Social inclusion and gender, Fundamental academic values

Moderator: Giuseppe Provenzano, Project Manager, Higher Education and Research, Union for the Mediterranean

Education for sustainable development:

Aravella Zachariou, Chair of the UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development

Social inclusion and gender:

Anastasia Zabaniotou, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, President of the Network of Mediterranean Engineering and Management Schools (RMEI)

Fundamental academic values:

Olfa Zéribi, Director for Western Europe, Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie

Open Debate with all the participants

12.20 – 12.35, Wrap-up and suggestions for the future

Marcello Scalisi, Director, Mediterranean Universities Union (UNIMED)

12.35 – 12.45, Closing Remarks

Álvaro Albacete, Deputy Secretary General in charge of Higher Education and Research, Union for the Mediterranean

13.00 – 14.30, Lunch

Master of ceremonies: João Lobo, Project Analyst, Higher Education and Research Division, Union for the Mediterranean

Stakeholders' participation:

Roger Albinyana, Managing Director, European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMED), Spain

Mostapha Bousmina, President, Euromed University of Fez (UEMF)

Mauve Carbonell, President, Téthys Consortium of Euro-Mediterranean Universities, France

Carlogiovanni Cereti, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

Abdelhamid El-Zoheiry, President, Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI)

Cristina Juanrranz de la Fuente, Assistant Director and Programming Coordinator, Casa Árabe, Spain

Georgios Koumbaros, Cyprus Pedagogical Institute

Hicham Lakhssassi, Université Mohammed V-Rabat & Consortium Euro-méditerranéen Droit et Famille, Morocco

Juan Llopis, Director of Institutional Relations and Projects, Universidad de Alicante, Spain

Giorgio Marinoni, Manager of Higher Education and Internationalisation, International Association of Universities

Francisco Matte Bon, Rector, Università Internazionale di Roma, Italy

Olivia Orozco de la Torre, Coordinator of Education and economics, Casa Árabe, Spain

Andrés Perelló Rodríguez, Director, Casa Mediterraneo, Spain

María Jesús Periago Gastón, Coordinator of the Campus Mare Nostrum of Science and Technology, Universidad de Murcia, Spain

Kherieh Rassas, Vice-President, University of Najah, Palestine

Juan Rayón, President, Erasmus Student Network (ESN)

Marcello Scalisi, Director, Mediterranean Universities Union (UNIMED)

Cristina Stefanelli, Project Manager, Mediterranean Universities Union (UNIMED)

Sara Tagliabracci, Student, Erasmus Student Network (ESN)

Josep Maria Vilalta, Director, Global University Network for Innovation (GUNi) and Catalan Association of Public Universities (ACUP), Spain

Anastasia Zabaniotou, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece - President of the Network of Mediterranean Engineering and Management Schools (RMEI)

Aravella Zachariou, Chair of the UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development, Cyprus

Olfa Zéribi, Director for Western Europe, Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie

Also attended the event representatives from ministries in charge of higher education that participated in the ad hoc Senior Officials' Meeting on 16 March, aimed at preparing the 1st UfM Ministerial Conference on Higher Education, as well as representatives from the EU Co-presidency (DG EAC and DG NEAR), the UfM Secretariat and the UfM Consultant SIRIS Academic.

Annex 4: Pictures of the UfM Higher Education Stakeholders' Meeting, Casa Mediterráneo, Alicante, Spain, March 17th 2023









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