



## 2023 UfM Youth Event

### Youth engagement for a sustainable and inclusive Mediterranean

Nov 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023 – Barcelona, Spain

UfM Secretariat Headquarters, Palau de Pedralbes

#### Background note

The Euro-Mediterranean region is home to a significant young population, approximately one-third of which are under the age of 25. Specifically in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries, this proportion rises to nearly half of the population. By contributing as active citizens, youth have the potential to shape the region and to find solutions to pressing challenges. However, this potential does not seem to be fully exploited due to the major challenges that affect the region, such as the impacts of climate and environmental crises, high unemployment rates among youth, limited access to quality education, inadequate representation of young people in public life and institutions, and gender inequalities.

With regard to climate and environmental challenges, youth have the potential to turn challenges into opportunities. While being increasingly aware of the threats posed by climate change, youth are also progressively becoming active agents in finding sustainable solutions to these challenges and have the potential to generate prosperity for the Euro-Mediterranean region. For instance, the twin green and digital revolutions offer a myriad of opportunities in terms of skill development, job creation, and active participation for young people, allowing them to become decisive agents of change.

The same applies to economic and employment challenges. Whereas the overwhelmingly young population of the Euro-Mediterranean region is transitioning into their most productive years and holds an immense potential for economic growth and stability, their potential is underutilized. This is displayed by alarming youth unemployment rates, ranging from 30% to 40% in certain countries of the MENA region. Additionally, one-third of the youth population in the MENA region are classified as NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), with young women being disproportionately affected. To exploit youth's full potential, pressing issues such as the skills mismatch must be addressed, and multi-stakeholder cooperation fostered.

To be able to play an active role in the shaping of their societies and to address challenges such as unemployment and climate change, youth's social inclusion and participation must be enhanced. The current state of affairs displays an alarming level of underrepresentation of young people in institutions and decision-making processes which is hindering their full potential as change-makers. In fact, individuals under 40 constitute only 16% of parliament members in the MENA region, and despite some progress, women continue to be significantly underrepresented in governing bodies. To harness the potential of Euro-Mediterranean youth, it is therefore imperative to actively involve them in decision-making processes and treat them as genuine partners in achieving inclusive and sustainable development in the region.

In this context, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) has placed a strong focus on empowering and engaging young people as catalysts for positive change through various initiatives, including via the



adoption of the [UfM Youth Strategy 2030 - Euro-Mediterranean Youth towards a Common Goal](#). As part of the Strategy, the UfM is also committed to support relevant and impactful youth-led initiatives in the region, as in the case of the Mediterranean Youth Academy (MYA).

**The Mediterranean Youth Academy (MYA)** is a youth-led project initiated by the Mediterranean Youth Foundation for Development (MYF) in 2019. Its long-term mission is to qualify and prepare selected young people from the Euro-Mediterranean area through non-formal education and interactive bottom-up training programs focused on issues relevant to the region. After two successful editions held in Egypt, this year's third edition will be co-organised by the UfM and the MYF, with the support of the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) and under the Patronage of the Egyptian Prime Minister. The third edition of the MYA will take place from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> of November 2023 at the Palau de Pedralbes in Barcelona, Spain back-to-back with the 2023 UfM Youth Event: Youth engagement for a sustainable and inclusive Mediterranean.

All in all, besides offering young people non-formal education and training opportunities, this year's edition of the MYA can be considered an integral part of the UfM Youth Strategy 2030 and the UfM Youth Agenda: Call for Action. A clear objective of this year's MYA is therefore, as set out in the UfM Youth Strategy 2030, to support bottom-up approaches that develop youth-led and youth-focused initiatives and to involve young people as active stakeholders and changemakers.

During this year's MYA, a series of workshops will be organised capitalizing on the good practices included in the UfM Youth Agenda: Call for Action to guide participants towards the formulation of concrete proposals for initiatives and policy recommendations that revolve around three thematic clusters: Climate Change & Climate Justice, Social Inclusion, and Youth Employment. The MYA will conclude on November 9th and will feature a youth event during which the UfM Youth Agenda: Call for Action will be officially adopted. The 2023 UfM Youth Event will also serve as an opportunity for young MYA participants and other youth experts to present their views and recommendations in a discussion with policymakers, international organisations, and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).

## 2) The UfM Youth Strategy and YAP

The UfM Youth Strategy 2030, launched in 2021, is a significant response to the call made by UfM Ministers of Foreign Affairs at the 2nd UfM Regional Forum in 2017, where they advocated for a "Positive Agenda for Youth in the Mediterranean." The Strategy fully aligns with both the UN Youth 2030 and the EU Youth Strategy, and its primary objective is to address the key challenges faced by young people in the region, with a specific focus on human and sustainable development. To achieve these goals, six priority areas have been identified, based on the UfM's core mandate:

- Youth, Climate Action, and Energy
- Youth and the Environment
- Youth and Urban and Rural Development
- Youth, Economic Development, and Digitalization
- Youth, Education, and Training
- Youth, Social Inclusion, and Participation.

Both the UfM Youth Strategy and UfM Youth Agenda: Call for Action were formulated via consultation with a variety of stakeholders including together policymakers, international and regional experts, CSOs, Business Support



Organisations (BSOs), and representatives of youth-led and youth-focused organizations. In fact, to operationalise the UfM Youth Strategy, the UfM National Focal Points Network has been established in 2022, while a series of online Working Group meetings on Youth Engagement were organized in 2023, focusing on the Strategy's priority areas. The outcome of these meetings, including recommendations and good practices, constitute the framework of the UfM Youth Agenda: Call for Action, which will be adopted on November 9th, 2023, back-to-back with the third edition of the Mediterranean Youth Academy (MYA).

The UfM Youth Agenda: Call for Action will serve as a tool for MYA participants to develop concrete bottom-up proposals for projects and initiatives to be possibly implemented in their communities with the aim of fostering youth empowerment and participation. Some of these proposals will eventually receive the support of the Mediterranean Youth Foundation (MYF) and its partners to be implemented at the local level. This approach is fully in line with the final aim of the UfM Youth Agenda: Call for Action and the MYA to empower young people and enable them to make a positive impact on the region's development.

### **3) Objectives of the 2023 UfM Youth Event: Youth engagement for a sustainable and inclusive Mediterranean**

The 2023 UfM Youth Event: Youth engagement for a sustainable and inclusive Mediterranean will provide an opportunity for decision-makers, international organizations, CSOs, and engaged young people to share ideas, good practices, and recommendations on three main topics: challenges and opportunities of the twin green and digital transition; ways to bridge the skills mismatch towards youth employability and entrepreneurship and social inclusion and participation of young men and women. Furthermore, during the event, the outcome of the third edition of the MYA will also be presented.

Specifically, the event aims at:

- Officially adopting the UfM Youth Agenda: Call for Action meant to operationalize the UfM Youth Strategy 2030.
- Share the key outcomes of the third edition of the Mediterranean Youth Academy.
- Foster dialogue between young Euro-Mediterranean individuals and decision-makers on the challenges and opportunities related to climate change, social inclusion, and job creation for young people.
- Discuss the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in empowering youth as agents of change.

