



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

SECRETARIAT OF THE UNION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN

ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2024

INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) is an intergovernmental Euro-Mediterranean organisation gathering, on equal footing and representation, all 27 countries of the European Union and 16 countries of the Southern and the Eastern Mediterranean shores. As a direct continuation of the Barcelona Process, the launch of the UfM in July 2008 was a true reflection of the shared political commitment of its 43 member states to strengthen regional cooperation, dialogue and integration in the Euro-Mediterranean area.

*The UfM Secretariat (hereafter referred to as UfMS), was established in 2008 as the first permanent structure dedicated to the enhancement of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. The Secretariat was domiciled in Barcelona; a location that signifies the permanent linkage between the institution and the process from which it inherited its *acquis*. Ever since its creation, the institution has been thriving to effectively achieve, driven by the principles of co-ownership and shared responsibility, the overarching goal of creating a Euro-Mediterranean area of peace, security, stability and shared prosperity in a manner that corresponds to the legitimate aspirations of its citizens.*

In line with the reflection on the UfM role, functioning and efficiency launched by the UfM Co-Presidency and member states in 2023, the UfM Secretariat sought to update its programming methodology, aiming for a more result-based approach focused on expected outputs, results and impact rather than just activities and action. In this sense, the present 2024 Work Programme is structured around the three main overarching goals of the UfMS in the Euro-Mediterranean region, namely:

To address strategic priorities in the Euro-Mediterranean area through the adoption of common regional agendas and engagement around high-level political initiatives and actions

1. To mobilise regional stakeholders for a more effective ownership and effective operationalization of regional agendas
2. To implement increased initiatives and projects for tangible regional impact on the ground

These three goals lie at the heart of the UfM *raison-d'être* and methodology of work, namely the so-called “three Ps”: Policies; Platforms; and Projects. This methodology aims at creating effective interlinks between decisions taken by member states at the political level and their operational translation into region-wide cooperation projects, which in return nourish the process of defining relevant policies.

Furthermore, this updated structure allows to better grasp as well the interlinkages existing between the UfMS sectors of action and the cross-sectoral work it carries out throughout the region. Indeed, under each of the three overarching goals is described how the UfMS aims to reach the five renewed priorities set by its member states, in November 2020/25th Anniversary of the Barcelona Process, to play a crucial role and provide for comparative advantages towards a sustainable post-pandemic recovery, paving the way for the creation of more resilient societies and economies in the region: i) environmental and climate action, ii) sustainable and inclusive economic and human development, iii) social inclusiveness and equality, iv) digital transformation, and v) civil protection.

It is clear that no single action can meet these ambitious priorities set by the member states. Therefore, in 2024, the UfMS will continue putting a strong emphasis to further interlinking the areas of action described above, to increase efficiency and impact, as well as relevance of its action. For example, actions on gender and climate finance will be examined; synergies between the green and digital transitions and job creation will be explored; water and youth; energy and sustainable housing; civil protection and climate action; research, innovation and the blue economy.... The specific interlinkages are explained and developed under each chapter.

Throughout these actions, the UfM Secretariat will continue the implementation of its 2017 Roadmap for Action, in line with the policy guidelines validated by the UfM Member States at sectoral level, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the EU's 2021 New Agenda for the Mediterranean and its Economic and Investment Plan as well as respective Council Conclusions. Always in accordance with the ongoing discussions on the UfM reform, the institution will also continue reinforcing its capacities, through the development of institutional and financial partnerships that leverage joint efforts and effective interaction between regional cooperation actors and increase the impact of UfM activities in the region.

As a platform for dialogue and cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean region, the UfM depends on the partnerships and cooperation that it can establish and develop with other institutions. This intertwined network of stakeholders allows for a small and agile structure such as the UfM Secretariat to actively work on a wide range of fields, promoting a deeper dialogue on a regional scale and supporting the implementation of projects of cooperation to the benefit of the peoples of the region. The UfM Secretariat will reinforce synergies among global, regional, national and local levels to implement its agenda efficiently.

Finally, the Secretariat will further consolidate its capacities through the enhancement of its working tools, by further implementing the label update, improving internal management and monitoring processes, reinforcing the capacities and skills of its staff as well as increasing the visibility of the UfM and raising awareness on its mission and action through its communication tools. It will also continue strengthening its relationship, processes and methodology of work with the UfM Co-Presidency and member states, through the SOM, to increase their support and engagement in the Secretariat's action.

DISCLAIMER: This work programme describes strategic actions planned to be implemented in broad terms. Additional activities linked to the priorities and processes described in this document may be included in the course of the year, always in line with the strategic objectives defined.

Implementation of the actions proposed will be always subject to the availability of resources (human and financial) as well as to the commitment and engagement of the stakeholders involved.

1. Addressing strategic priorities in the Euro-Mediterranean area through the adoption of common regional agendas and engagement around high-level political initiatives and actions

The UfM's political dimension is structured around Ministerial and governmental representatives' meetings, which define the priorities of UfM work through the adoption of common agendas in key strategic areas. Through declarations adopted by consensus of the 43 UfM member states, Ministerial Meetings address strategic orientations in the region, and define the scope and objectives of a shared Mediterranean agenda.

Since 2020, member states renewed their joint commitments in most of the strategic sectors, having the UfM working in updated and improved frameworks, aligned with the current challenges and needs of the Euro-Mediterranean region and allowing for increased and strengthened cross-sectorial and transversal activity to reinforce synergies and impact on the ground.

A consensus of 43 countries on any Ministerial Declaration is a remarkable challenge and requires in any event an iterative process. UfM practice so far has shown that best results in terms of quality are achieved if also other relevant stakeholders are being involved, i.e. non-governmental actors such as the academia and civil society. This leads however the process to be more complex.

Hence, following discussions in the context of the UfM reform launched in 2023 (see part 4), the UfM Secretariat will continue: assist the Co-Presidency, where required and on the basis of its needs, in the elaboration of the concept of the Ministerial Meeting, the preparation of the Ministerial Declaration, and the negotiations with UfM members, facilitate the regional dialogue platforms, provide input to the Ministerial Declarations throughout the process, and conduct the envisaged public consultation to collect the views of non-state actors (multi-stakeholder approach).

1.1 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT

i) Economic development

- Following the **12th UfM Ministerial on Trade** (Valencia, October 2023), Member States committed to a rules-based trading system, fostering resilient economies, fighting market access barriers, enhancing regulatory convergence and promoting regional integration and cooperation. The **UfM Regional Platform on Trade and Investment**'s meeting will be held twice by the UfM Co-Presidency, to take forward work on ministerial outcomes and follow-up initiatives, with an emphasis on three interrelated priority areas of the Platform (Sustainable Trade, Sustainable Investment, Regional Integration).

Since the adoption of the **UfM Ministerial on Industrial Cooperation (Brussels, February 2014)**, the **UfM Regional Platform on Industrial Cooperation** has been actively engaged in putting in place the successive work programmes in this sector.

The Platform's meeting will be held by the UfM Co-Presidency in order to follow up on the last year of the UfM Work programme on Industrial Cooperation 2021-2024, which aims to:

1. *Strengthen the EU-South neighbourhood value chain integration;*
2. *Encourage internationalisation and support to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), innovation, and access to finance;*
3. *Enhance digitalisation;*

4. *Support MSMEs green transition of the UfM region;*
5. *Promote policies for social economy and for decent job creation.*

- **The UfM Ministerial on Digital Economy (Barcelona, September 2014)** called upon the removal of the regional barriers in the digital sector such as: e-trust services including e-signatures, e-health, connectivity for research and education institutions, harmonization of digital economy-related legal frameworks, in particular telecommunications or open data. In that sense, the **UfM Regional Platform on Digital Economy and Internet Access**, will be held by the UfM Co-Presidency to tackle issues related to the deep and disruptive digital transformation that affects all aspects of social and economic life, and that offer the opportunity to unleash massive potential, should the massive digital divide in infrastructure and skills be tackled properly.

ii) **Employment**

Following the 5th **UfM Ministerial on Employment and Labour (Marrakech, May 2022)** gathering the representatives of the 43 UfM Member States, Social Partners and experts, the **UfM Regional Platform on Employment and Labour** adopted the “UfM Roadmap 2022-2025: Implementation of the UfM Ministerial Declaration on Employment and Labour”, over the identified priorities, namely: Promote an economy that works for people with youth- and gender-responsive employment and social policies; support women’s and youth engagement in building socio-economic resilience and recovery, while paying due attention to the most vulnerable people. In the implementation of these priorities, social dialogue and civil society participation will be taken into account.

The Platform’s meeting will be held twice in 2024 by the UfM Co-Presidency as part of the UfM Roadmap 2022-2025 and will follow up on the national implementation of the priorities agreed by the Ministers of Employment and Labour. The UfM Community of Practice on Monitoring has been given a new impetus based on the UfM ministerial declaration on employment and labour (Marrakech, 2022). The main objective of this Community of Practice is to foster a culture of monitoring and evidence-based policy making in view of improving efficiency of policy design and implementation. These meetings will be key to prepare the 6th UfM Ministerial on Employment and Labour, to be held in 2025.

1.2 HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

i) **Higher Education**

A common agenda on enhancing regional cooperation on higher education will be adopted by the first **UfM Ministerial Declaration on Higher Education** to step up cooperation in areas such as governance, internationalisation, social inclusion and gender, digital education, greening education, and shared academic values. The Ministerial Conference, to be held in Fez, initially foreseen for Novembre 2023 was postponed until the first quarter of 2024 due to a change in the European Commissioner in charge of the Education portfolio.

In 2024, the **network of national focal points** shall define an **implementation plan** for the Ministerial Declaration around the main priority areas.

Furthermore, the UfM Secretariat will work with the Member States and the European Commission to promote the Erasmus+ programme in the Mediterranean area as a social cohesion tool aimed at contributing to build a more integrated region.

ii) **Research and innovation**

The main political commitments on Research and Innovation are issued by the **first UfM Ministerial Declaration in Research and Innovation (Paris, June 2022)**. The Declaration acknowledged eight Roadmaps on the three agreed priority themes in the field of research and innovation:

- a. Health,
- b. Climate change; and
- c. Renewable Energy.

Other strategic political priorities highlighted include the support to a dedicated Implementation Plan, committing to mobilising resources including from national funding agencies and creating, where possible, synergies with bilateral programmes, Research and Innovation (R&I) actions, capacity building actions, research infrastructures, coordination and communication actions (creation of a web portal to be hosted by UfM Secretariat) and horizontal integration/cross-cutting issues.

Other relevant aspects of the Ministerial Declaration will be followed up, including supporting the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA) programme as a unique research and innovation platform enabling addressing complex societal challenges in the region, aligned with the overall priority themes and, participating in the implementation and deployment of Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030”, including its “Mediterranean zero pollution lighthouse” and other EU Missions.

Follow-up actions to the Ministerial will be supported by UfMS, including the Mediterranean Initiative, included in the Horizon Europe Work Programme for 2023-2024. The UfMS will support the involvement of UfM Member states through meetings focusing on capacity building, matchmaking and awareness raising on existing opportunities.

Complementary objectives include science diplomacy as a tool for cooperation, and developing researchers’ career, skills, and mobility.

Finally, further synergies will be sought between the UfM Political Framework with 5+5 Dialogue Ministerial Conference on Research, Innovation and Higher Education (Nouakchott, 2022), contributing to the Work Plan in the areas where complementariness can be found at Euro-Mediterranean level.

1.3 SOCIAL AND CIVIL AFFAIRS

i) Women Empowerment

- **Follow up on the Roadmap for implementation of the 5th Ministerial Declaration on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society (Madrid, October 2022)**

Following the presentation and adoption of the roadmap for Implementation 2023-2025 in 2023, foreseen by the Ministerial Declaration 2022, the UfMS will focus on the monitoring the implementation of the roadmap throughout 2024, including the 2nd reporting exercise on gender indicators. This will be organized through 4 Ad-Hoc working group meetings under the framework of the UfM Regional Platform on Women Empowerment to work on the Ministerial priorities (women economic empowerment and leadership, gender equality and climate change, violence against women girls in a context of economic, social, and environmental crisis).

- **UfM High Level Conference on Women for the Mediterranean 2024**

Building on the last High-Level Conference on Women for the Mediterranean which took place in Madrid in 2022 and focused on the recommendations to implement the 5th Ministerial Declaration, the 2024 High Level Conference on Women for the Mediterranean will take place in spring 2024 in Cyprus. The Conference, which is organised by the UfM every two years.

- **In the framework of the 5th Ministerial Declaration on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society, the UfMS will particularly focus in 2024 on:**

- significantly increase gender-responsive investment in the framework of climate change and in environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes, through the mobilization of financial resources from all sources, including public, private, national and international resource mobilization and allocation
- promote the establishing of regional platforms aiming at supporting Women Economic Empowerment in the Euro-Mediterranean region.
- Promote gender equality and inclusive models of leadership since early-age education and in all fields, including STEMs education and skills, allowing girls to demonstrate their leadership abilities.
- support and encourage women’s entrepreneurship, through incubation programmes for the early, seed and growth stages, investments on entrepreneurship education, by enabling access to networks and promotion of role models and mentoring.
- provide comprehensive legal counselling, legal services, and social support for victims of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) including legal counselling as well as access to medical, housing, child-care, education and training, to allow victims’ access to justice and redress, social reintegration and employment opportunities. Invest in professional training programmes for service providers to victims of VAWG, including women and girls with disability, refugee and displaced.

ii) Youth

Follow up on the “UfM Youth Strategy 2030: Euro-Mediterranean Youth towards a Common Goal” and “UfM Youth Action Plan”

- Following the adoption of the UfM Youth Strategy 2030 by the UfM Senior Officials at the end of 2021, the UfMS worked on its operationalization via four thematic Working Groups (WG) composed of the UfM National Focal Points (NFPs) network on Youth, international, regional, and local Civil Society organisations (CSOs), experts, and other stakeholders. The WGs focused on the six thematic priorities identified in the UfM Youth Strategy, namely: (i) climate action and energy, (ii) environment, (iii) urban and rural development, (iv) economic development and employment, (v) education (including non-formal education) and training, and (vi) social inclusion of Euro-Mediterranean youth. As a result, a series of recommendations to policymakers and good practices in terms of policies, projects, and initiatives have been identified and serves as the basis of the UfM Youth Action Plan, presented and adopted in November 2023 in Barcelona.

As part of the implementation phase of the UfM Youth Strategy 2030 and after the launch and adoption of the UfM Youth Action Plan, the UfMS, in the framework of the WG’s meetings will work closely with the NFPs on Youth in 2024 to identify at national level concrete actions and initiatives for fostering youth empowerment. As stated in the policy framework of the UfM Youth Strategy 2023, there is a need for a common regional agenda that proposes regional solutions that can be pursued by the UfM and its Member States in coordination with their partners especially, international youth-led and focused organisations, civil society, think tanks, other international organisations, and the private sector”.

- The UfM Regional Platform on Youth’s meetings and exchanges will assess the relevance of **a UfM Ministerial Conference on Youth in a later stage** under the agreement of the UfM Co-Presidency and member states.
- The UfM Youth Strategy focus on “Youth and Economic Development” as one of its two strategic goals. In particular, it calls out to “promote and support innovative young entrepreneurs, including entrepreneurial opportunities yielded by the social economy”. Within this political framework, the UfM will work in 2024 to **support young Mediterranean people in accessing opportunities in the social economy sector**. Furthermore, the members of the UfM Regional Platform on Youth will be pivotal in the identification of further stakeholders contributing both in terms of content and networking opportunities.

iii) Civil protection

Preparation of a UfM Ministerial Meeting on Civil protection for 2025

During 2024 the UfMS will work in preparation of a UfM Ministerial Declaration of Civil Protection, on the basis of a roadmap and action plan agreed the 2023 Directors-General for Civil Protection of the UfM member countries and in the framework of the UfM regional dialogue platform on Civil Protection.

Civil protection contributes to the objectives of peace, stability and security set out in the Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean of 13 July 2008, as a follow-up to the Barcelona Process (1995), aimed at transforming the Mediterranean into an area of peace, democracy, cooperation and prosperity. The third Civil Protection Directors General meeting (11-12 February 2019) confirms the UfM as “a key platform for Euro-Mediterranean dialogue on civil protection, by facilitating links between the political and operational levels”.

iv) Disability

Building an UfM Regional Dialogue on Disability

Provided that the commitment of the UfM member states and Co-Presidency is secured, in 2024, the UfMS will work in view of building a UfM Regional Dialogue on Disability whose works will help to assess the relevance of a future UfM Ministerial Declaration on Disability in 2025-2026 (in line with the pillars of the EU Disability Strategy 2021-2030).

The process follows 1) the reference to socio-economic inclusion of youth and women with disabilities on the 2022 UfM Ministerials on Labour and Employment and on Women, 2) the results of the 1st Euro-Mediterranean Conference on the Socio-Economic Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (Barcelona, January 2022), as well as of the preliminary and partial situational assessment (mixing desk research and consultation methods) of the social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities in the Euro-Mediterranean region carried out in 2023.

The UfM Regional Dialogue on Disability will help to 1) review and validate the outcome of the baseline study on inclusion of people with disabilities in the Euro-Mediterranean region 2) provide the technical expertise to prepare the participation of the UfM to the Global Disability Summit in 2025 and 3) will be involved in the preparation of the 3rd UfM Conference on Disability.

1.4 TRANSPORT AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

i) Transport

The **2nd UfM Ministerial Conference on Transport (online, February 2023)** sets out the new mandate for transport cooperation in the UfM area of action through the adoption of the **2023 Ministerial Declaration** notably the new **Regional Transport Action Plan (RTAP)** for the Mediterranean region horizon 2027.

- The main objective of the Ministerial Declaration is to reaffirm continued collective political support of all partners to developing a safe, secure, sustainable, efficient and connected transport system based on harmonized transport rules and standards, as well as an integrated multimodal transport connectivity network. This includes commitment to Euro-Mediterranean transport cooperation founded on two complementary pillars:
 - i) regulatory reform and convergence in all transport sectors (maritime, road, railways, civil aviation and urban transport), and
 - ii) the extension of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) to the Mediterranean region.
- The new RTAP includes 28 specific actions to be implemented, including: national transport strategies and policies, infrastructure and logistics, maritime transport, land transport (incl. road, rail and urban transport), civil aviation, as well as actions for the implementation and evaluation of the RTAP.
- The new RTAP takes into account the latest developments in key global and regional agendas and policy frameworks for both policy transfer and regulatory convergence, inter alia, the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda and its transport-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets, the Paris Agreement, the latest provisions and strategies adopted by transport-related international organisations; the European Green Deal,

whose objectives for the transport sector are developed in the EU's Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy adopted in December 2020; and the EU's "Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood" and the "Economic and Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbours" of 9 February 2021, as well as the Global Gateway Communication of December 2021.

- As a follow-up of the Ministerial Declaration, the **UfM Regional Platform on Transport Connectivity, together with its thematic working groups** will convene in 2024 to monitor the implementation of the new RTAP.

ii) Urban Development

- The **3rd UfM Ministerial Conference on Sustainable Urban Development** (Croatia, May 2023) provides a key mandate for implementing the UfM Urban Agenda, especially through the new UfM Strategic Urban Development Action Plan 2040 and its Housing Action Plan.
- In this regard, the UfM will move forward to:
 - iii) promote citizen engagement and co-creation as well as bottom-up approaches in the drafting and designing of projects and policies.
 - iv) Identify strategies to improve urban health by promoting better planning, providing local communities with social spaces and services, climate action, ensuring the sustainability of natural resources, and nature-based solutions.
 - v) Encourage joint work in sustainable port-city transformation and port-city cooperation.
 - vi) Address the promotion of public policies and programmes to tackle affordable housing including the set-up of Housing National Housing Agencies and Housing Observatories.
 - vii) boosting energy efficiency in buildings through the set-up of national programmes or the improvement of legislation.
 - viii) Promote the valuation and dissemination of vernacular architecture and traditional building skills, methodologies, and materials as a means to increase cultural embeddedness and climate adaptation solutions.
 - ix) Increase the safety of the citizens and the resilience of cities in the face of natural and man-made disasters.
 - x) Launch a process that could conclude with a comparative analysis/repository of coastal land planning governance models and instruments across the region and a set of recommendations.
 - xi) Continue to promote projects that could be showcased as best practices under the UfM Strategic Urban Action Plan.
 - xii) Encourage stakeholders to strengthen efforts in developing comparable data to support evidence-based policies and investments and accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the regional level.
 - xiii) Emphasise the consideration for urban-rural linkages.

As a follow-up of the Ministerial Declaration, the UfM Regional Platform on Sustainable Urban Development, together with its thematic working groups will convene in 2024 to refine priority areas of work and identify further opportunities to connect with relevant activities based on the outcomes of the Ministerial meeting.

1.5 WATER, ENVIRONMENT AND BLUE ECONOMY

Under these portfolios, the UfM Secretariat will continue in 2024 to foster cross-cutting aspects between the three UfM Ministerial declarations on 1) Water, 2) Environment and Climate Change, and 3) Sustainable blue economy, and their connections with the 2030 GreenerMed Agenda launched in 2021. It will as well aim at consolidating the Mediterranean joint voice in regional and international political for a dedicated to these issues, reinforcing the role of women in these sectors, as well as youth and entrepreneurs' engagement.

i) Water

The **UfM Ministerial Declaration on Water (Valetta, April 2017)** called for a UfM Water Agenda to enhance regional cooperation towards sustainable and integrated water management in the UfM region, as well as to mainstream efforts towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, in particular SDG 6 on availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

The UfM Secretariat will continue to work in 2024 to implement the initiatives and actions that were agreed upon by the Member States in December 2018. These include the four thematic priorities of the Water Agenda.

- Water-Energy-Food Ecosystem Nexus (WEFE),
- Water and Climate Change adaptation (WCCA),
- Water-Employment-Migration Nexus (WEM),
- And Water Access and Sanitation (WASH).

These thematic priorities shall be reflected in the UfM Financial and Investment Strategy for Water, through notably the ad hoc Taskforce on Water Finance and Investment, in view of improving the conditions for the funding of projects and activities within the sector, as well as the coordination with other sectors, developing strategies and programmes to advance the achievement of the goals of the 2030 UN agenda.

The continuous evolution of the UfM's water agenda will be maintained in 2024. The agenda will also be aligned with the biannual workplans (2023-2024) of the UfM Water Policy Framework of Actions 2030.

- Water and Environment; increase the connexion between the water and environment portfolio priorities, including through the UfM leadership and representation of Mediterranean countries in regional and international fora touching upon these issues such as the Conference of the Parties (COP) 16 of the Convention on Biological Diversity, set to take place in Turkey in 2024, and the UN Source to sea initiatives and biodiversity.

ii) ENVIRONMENT: Preserving natural resources and boosting green economy

Following on the **UfM Ministerial on Environment and Climate Change (Cairo, October 2021)** and the Greener Med Agenda 2030 it has launched as a framework for regional cooperation, the UfM will:

- Further advance the endorsed priority axes of work, namely:
 - Supporting the transition to a green, circular and socially inclusive economy based on sustainable consumption and production practices and nature-based solutions;
 - Preventing and reducing pollution on land, sea and air;
 - and protecting, preserving, managing, and restoring natural resources in the Mediterranean region within an integrated ecosystem approach, including terrestrial, marine and coastal dimension.
- Promote cross linkages with: Climate change and education for sustainable development (ESD) as transversal axes, in line with the 2022 United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Environment Ministerial in Cyprus and related adoption of the ESD Action Plan. A policy paper on education for sustainable development is under elaboration.
- Measure and track progress towards above-mentioned priorities up to 2030 through the GreenerMed result based monitoring, evaluation and reporting mechanism, already set in place and ongoing. In early 2024 the updated GreenerMed monitoring report will be available, measuring progress against the baseline report released in 2021.

iii) BLUE ECONOMY: Promoting blue economy investment through sound Policies.

- In line with the **UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy (online, February 2021)** and the UfM Sustainable Blue Economy roadmap, the UfMS will:

Further advance the endorsed priority axes of work, namely:

- governance and the future of sea basin strategies in the Mediterranean region
 - marine research and innovation, skills, careers and employment:
 - sustainable food from the sea: fisheries and aquaculture
 - sustainable, climate-neutral and zero-pollution maritime transport and ports
 - interactions between marine litter and the blue economy
 - coastal and maritime tourism
 - maritime Spatial Planning and Integrated Coastal Zone Management
 - marine renewable energies
 - maritime safety and security of blue economy activities
 - sustainable investment in the blue economy.
- Implement the 2023 update of the Roadmap for the implementation of the UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy produced and approved by the UfM result based monitoring, evaluation and reporting mechanism, already set in place and ongoing. As part of the monitoring, the Roadmap updated in April 2023, will undergo another revision in 2025.
 - Enhance the coordination with all sub-regional and global platforms including WESTMED, in order to ensure alignment of the regional and sub-regional agendas, UN Ocean Decade Conference, Our Ocean Conference, as well as all Regional Relevant initiatives.

1.6 ENERGY AND CLIMATE ACTION

i) Energy

UfM Member States adopted **the Ministerial Declaration on Energy in Lisbon in 2021**, expressing strong support for three UfM Energy Platforms: The UfM Regional Electricity Market Platform, the UfM Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Platform and the UfM Gas Platform. They further invited the Platforms to elaborate a Roadmap for Action in line with the objectives of this Declaration and to support its implementation after adoption. The Roadmap, adopted in 2022, identifies sixteen energy priority areas for the Mediterranean region as specified in the declaration. Some of the key elements include:

- intend to review, re-design and implement ambitious roadmaps and targets for energy efficiency in all sectors and policies, including the development of possible shared incentivizing frameworks for innovative technologies and the removal of regulatory and financial bottlenecks.
- intend to improve the business environment and the investment climate for sustainable energy supply and demand.
- envisage to jointly work to strengthen the regional electricity interconnections, smart grids and digitalization, increase electricity exchange, when necessary,
- Invite the UfM Co-Presidency in collaboration with the Platforms' Secretariats to continue coordinating the work of the three UfM Energy Platforms, including also where relevant other platforms of the UfM such as Research and Innovation, involving the relevant actors in the manner set out in the working guidelines.
- envisage to foster an exchange of knowledge and capacity building addressed to public institutions and energy agencies.

In light of the above, the UfM Secretariat will focus in 2024 on:

- Facilitating the adoption of a regional technical and regulatory framework to enhance interconnection of North-South and South-South energy systems with an emphasis on increasing the share of renewable energy.
- Facilitating the development of green hydrogen solutions by leveraging the regional momentum to develop a regional strategy on hydrogen, to be developed and implemented by the member states.
- Backing programmes on energy efficiency, especially in the public sector and at the level of local authorities

- Promoting the Mediterranean energy agenda in global processes including the United Nations (UN) the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and others. This aims to address the challenges and encourage the global scaling up of solutions developed in the region.

Moreover, in accordance with the Co-Presidency's request, the UfM will aim at reviving the political dialogue and engagement with Member States. To this end, the UfM will arrange bilateral meetings with focal points from Member States and coordinate with the European Commission, particularly DG NEAR, DG ENERGY, and European Union Delegations, to facilitate joint meetings. The aim of this initiative is to enhance coordination and foster greater cooperation with Member States, enabling the effective achievement of the shared objectives outlined in the Declaration.

ii) Climate Action

UfM Member States adopted in Cairo in 2021 the 2nd UfM Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Climate Change which sets the desired course of policy action in a broad number of domains, including achieving climate neutrality, limiting temperature increase to 1.5°, reducing fossil fuels use, phasing out of fossil fuel subsidies, reinforcing science-society-policy nexus, fostering regional cooperation, scaling up finance to the region, enhancing awareness and understanding of climate change, integrating gender and youth consideration into climate policy, action and investments.

Underlining the role of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) as a key forum for political dialogue in the region and a valuable platform to achieve effective regional cooperation, the UfM Climate Change Expert Group will support to finalise and support the implementation of UfM Climate Action Roadmap, in line with the objectives of this Declaration. In addition, the UfM Environment and Climate Change Working Group will support the UfM Agenda 2030 towards a Greener Mediterranean. The UfMS will use these platforms to monitor the progress and regularly review the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration.

The Declaration highlights the following key points related to climate change:

- The urgent need to address climate change and the commitment of UfM member states to the implementation of the Paris Agreement.
- The importance of both mitigation and adaptation measures to effectively address climate change impacts in the Mediterranean region with member states encouraged to develop and implement national climate action plans and strategies.
- The potential to scale up resources to support the transition towards more resilient, inclusive and sustainable economies including through the promotion of renewable energy sources to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote sustainable development.
- The importance of effective governance and the mobilization of climate finance to support climate action. It encourages the establishment of transparent and accountable governance mechanisms and the facilitation of financial resources for climate projects and initiatives.

The declaration led the UfM to focus its political agenda on the following:

- The Science-Policy-Society Nexus: to use science-based reports to inform decision making on climate policies and increase public awareness on climate change including the publication of thematic reports, development of climate tools and services, and collaboration with leading scientific organizations such as the Mediterranean Experts on Climate and Environmental Change (MedECC), the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECWMF) and Copernicus.
- Support for the Implementation of the Paris Agreement: to strengthen institutions, plans, and policies linked to the development and advancement of national climate change targets. Actions include capacity-building, cooperation, and knowledge sharing on monitoring, adaptation, and technology transfer.
- Mobilization of Climate Finance for Developing Countries: to enhance the enabling policy frameworks, institutional capacities, and instruments for financing and investment in UfM Member States. It aims to improve the quantity and quality of climate finance flows and facilitate coordination with international financial institutions.

- Upon requests from Members States and the Co-Presidency, facilitating awareness, understanding and implications of international regulations and policies impacting the Mediterranean region to UfM Members States (i.e.: CBAM - Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, Green Bonds)
- Strengthening the visibility of Mediterranean regional challenges and solutions in global climate processes, especially within the scope of the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations. Strengthening North-South and South-South cooperation to facilitate exchanges and engagements of stakeholders at multilateral level.

Moreover, in accordance with the Co-Presidency's request, the UfM will aim at reviving the political dialogue and engagement with Member States. To this end, the UfM will arrange bilateral meetings with focal points from Member States and coordinate with the European Commission, particularly DG NEAR, DG CLIMA, and European Union Delegations, to facilitate joint meetings. The aim of this initiative is to enhance coordination and foster greater cooperation with Member States, enabling the effective achievement of the shared objectives outlined in the Declaration.

2. Mobilising regional stakeholders for a more effective ownership and effective operationalization of regional agendas

The UfM's policy dimension is structured around regional dialogue platforms, working groups and ad hoc meetings involving not only representatives from governmental institutions and experts, but also regional and international organizations, local authorities, civil society, private sector and financial institutions.

This close interaction between national experts and stakeholders is a fundamental tool to exchange on the ministerial mandates, better understand the needs, share experiences, identify best practices and promote concrete projects of cooperation, as well as monitoring progress in implementing the regional agendas.

In view of reinforcing this dimension of the UfM work, the UfM Secretariat launched a streamlining exercise in 2023, in the context of the UfM reform, to give the platforms more coherence, effectiveness and impact.

2.1. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT

The **UfM Hub for Jobs, Trade and Investment** which was launched in 2022 and which is part of the **Team Europe Initiative for Jobs through Trade and Investment in the Southern Neighbourhood**, forms the overarching framework under which most of the activities by the UfM Secretariat in the field of Economic Development and Employment are realised. Youth and women remain to be at the heart of these activities, with youth and women empowerment, gender equality and just transition being transversal values. The following activities under the UfM Hub for Jobs, Trade and Investment, unlike the UfM Regional Platforms of Dialogue stipulated under section 1.1, involve not only representatives from governmental institutions and experts, but also regional and international organizations, local authorities, civil society, private sector and financial institutions.

i) Economic development

- **The 6th UfM Trade and Investment Forum**

During the 12th UfM Ministerial on Trade, the UfM Ministers encouraged the organization of business-to-governments and business-to-business meetings in the region, with a special focus on enforcement and implementation of the existing bilateral and regional trade agreements, as well as the fight against non-tariff barriers and advancing work on further economic integration, including through mobilization of capital flows for sustainable development and decent job creation. Acting upon this mandate, the UfM Secretariat will organize the UfM Trade and Investment Forum, the sixth edition in six successive years, tackling the most pertinent opportunities and challenges.

- **UfM Workshop on Sustainable investment**

In line with the three pillars of the Team Europe Initiative on Jobs through Trade and Investment (TEI) and acting upon the relevant Ministerial Declarations, the UfM Secretariat will capitalize on its previous work and continue raising the awareness of its stakeholders about the importance of driving investments towards serving sustainability goals. In this context and with the objective of synergy-building exchange, a workshop will be organized to exchange on best practices and inspiring strategies in the region.

- **Meeting of Central Banks representatives**

The UfM Secretariat will convene Central Banks in the region to discuss the challenges such as financial stability of the region amid successive severe shocks. This includes the chronic high inflation rates that jeopardize the purchasing power of citizens and might thereby lead to social unrest, as well as the access to finance and the green finance trends.

- **Sustainable finance and supply chains laws**

The UfM Secretariat will bring together multiple stakeholders to discuss the financial tools available for monitoring low-carbon transition in relation to economic activities, as well as the best practices in building supply chains that are conducive to just transition.

- **Creative Economy Forum**

Within the framework of its continuous support to sustainable economic sectors, the UfM Secretariat will promote creative economy by holding during 2024 a dedicated event to address ways and means of enhancing its important role in economic development and enabling sustainability in the Mediterranean region.

ii) **Employment**

- **The UfM Community of Practice on Youth Employment in the Southern Mediterranean**

During the 5th UfM Ministerial on Employment and Labour, the UfM Ministers encouraged to further develop the use of Communities of Practice, notably on youth employment. The UfM Secretariat has therefore launched a Community of Practice on Youth Employment meeting online and twice a year in person, including as from 2024 a field visit. Its purpose is to collect, discuss, assess and disseminate experiences and good practices inter alia in supporting decent job creation as well as quality education systems and training, skills and employability.

- **UfM Med4Jobs Stakeholders' Dialogue**

Within the framework of the "UfM Roadmap 2022-2025: Implementation of the UfM Ministerial Declaration on Employment and Labour", the 4th edition of the Mediterranean Initiative for Jobs (Med4Jobs) Stakeholders' Dialogue will be held to take stock of the progress achieved and to strengthen regional cooperation and enhance regional integration. It will focus on the promotion of employment and decent work for all.

- **UfM Workshop on Future of Work**

Within the framework of the "UfM Roadmap 2022-2025: Implementation of the UfM Ministerial Declaration on Employment and Labour", the UfM Secretariat will partner with the European Training Foundation (ETF) to organize a joint workshop dedicated to the Future of Work with a focus on just transition, decent work and social protection.

2.2. HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

i) **Higher Education**

- **UfM Higher Education Stakeholders' Meetings.**

The main higher education stakeholders, mainly universities and networks of universities, will be engaged in the formulation of the implementation plan of the UfM Ministerial Declaration on Higher Education and its follow up. Specific actions should be foreseen for each of the six priority areas: governance; internationalisation; inclusive approaches; digital education; green approaches; and shared fundamental academic values.

The two UfM-labelled universities, Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI) and *Université Euro-Méditerranéenne de Fès* (UEMF), will be closely associated to the UfM Policy Conference in Fez and the UfM Higher Education Stakeholders Meeting in Barcelona, as well as the HOMERe (High Opportunity for Mediterranean Executive Recruitment) internships' programme and the MedNC (Mediterranean New Chance) second chance schools' network.

ii) **Research and innovation**

- **30th UfM Regional Platform in Research and Innovation.** A meeting of the UfM Regional Platform on Research and Innovation will oversee the implementation of Ministerial priorities.

- **Meetings of the UfM R&I Bureau** will prepare the Platform meetings, and oversee the development of the Implementation plan and of the UfM Support Mechanism for R&I.
- **Mediterranean Research event on matchmaking and access to research infrastructure.**
Answering to a systemic need for researchers to network among each other, build consortia and spread awareness about access to research infrastructure, a conference is foreseen, complementing the work of the Regional Platform for R&I.
- **Study on the state of Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean.**
A technical assistance, in cooperation with the National Focal Points for Research and Innovation, will help identify key data, indicators and information on the state of cooperation on Research and Innovation in the Euro-Mediterranean area, as a way to contribute to the implementation of the Ministerial Mandate.
- **Workshop on Science Diplomacy (SD) actions in the Mediterranean.**
Following up on Euro-Mediterranean Conference on Science Diplomacy, to be held on 3 October 2023, UfMS will foresee a follow-up workshop in order to operationalize and offer training and networking opportunity. The workshop will feed on the outcomes of the Conference and will try to identify and work with main stakeholders on SD, willing to kickstart pilot actions. Smaller support meetings and actions can be envisioned in the course of 2024 in order to support this process, working with partners such as the European Commission, the European Science Diplomacy Alliance, Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF), and others when relevant.

Further support activities will include the hosting of a Euro-Mediterranean digital platform on R&I, meetings, questionnaires, studies, data collection, and horizontal capacity building actions.

2.3. SOCIAL AND CIVIL AFFAIRS

i) Women Empowerment

UfM Platform on Women Empowerment's meetings:

- Based on the inputs gathered from the Ad-Hoc working group meetings to be organized under the framework of the UfM Regional Platform on Women Empowerment as well as from the UfM High Level Conference on Women for the Mediterranean scheduled in April 2024, the Secretariat will consult with the Co-Presidencies, the National Focal Points and key stakeholders in order to assess the opportunity to hold the next ministerial conference in 2025 as proposed in the 5th UfM Ministerial on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society.

Women Business Forum (WBF) 2024: female led business provided with financial opportunities and new skills

- Organisation of the 2024 Women Business Forum edition to promote women entrepreneurship and business development. The Women Business Forum has the objective to provide a platform for dialogue, exchange of experience and networking around business and investment opportunities for women-owned and women-led-businesses from both shores of the Mediterranean. The specific focus of the event will be structured around the priority of greener businesses.
- The coordination of the regional structured network on women entrepreneurship set-up in 2023

Nexus Gender-Environment-Climate Change: regional stakeholders, financial institutions, women-led business CSOs provided with an open space for exchanges of practices, networks, opportunities and skills

- Coordination of the UfM Women Community of Practices on the nexus Gender, Environment and Climate Change built up in 2023, which will work as a based knowledge regional platform to exchange of good practices, share data analysis, provide operational recommendations to the policy makers and implementing actors on gender-responsive environmental policies.

Med Tech Women Network (MTWN) female led business provided with financial opportunities and new skills

- Following the official launch of the Med Women in Tech Network in 2023, a platform which aims to cooperate and advocate for women in technology, the UfM will support in 2024 the regional network in fostering economic growth and job creation for female entrepreneurs and in changing the perception of women in the region.

Med Women in Tech Network (MTWN) Festival

- Building on the success of the 2022 and 2023 MTWN Festival which engaged different regional stakeholders, such as women entrepreneurs, investors, researchers, and corporates in several activities, including brainstorming sessions, technical panels, and discussion. The MTWN Festival will be organized again in 2024 to increase women’s participation and status in the technology sector within the Mediterranean region.

International Women’s Day: awareness on the challenges and opportunities for women empowerment raised at regional level.

- The specific focus of the event will be in line with the priority theme of the UN Commission on the Status of Women for 2024: “Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective.”

Women Peace and Security Agenda: a comprehensive regional programme structured around 3 pillars:

1. Bridging the gaps for a comprehensive approach to Women, Peace, and Security training.
2. Fostering collaboration among different initiatives, including academic centres, peacekeeping training centres, and civil society organizations.
3. Consolidating international and regional cooperation.

ii) Youth

Creation of the UfM Regional Platform on Youth

After the launch and adoption of the UfM Youth Action Plan, and after consulting with the UfM National Focal Points (NFPs) network on Youth, in 2024 the UfMS will work toward establishing an UfM Regional Platform on Youth that will gather the NFPs, governmental representatives, international youth-led and focused organisations, CSOs, representatives from the academia, and experts. The main objective of the UfM Regional Platform on Youth is to create an enabling environment to facilitate the full participation of young people in relevant aspects related to the six thematic priorities identified in the UfM Youth Strategy. On the one hand, this will be done through stimulating the contamination of ideas and the proposal of regional initiatives by the members of the UfM Regional Platform on Youth. On the other hand, relevant regional projects and initiatives organised by external partners will be also assessed to identify the ones to support the UfM role as a platform for regional cooperation.

Organization of thematic Working Groups on youth policies:

In line with the UfM Youth Strategy, the UfMS will organise a series of thematic online WGs focused on the six priorities areas (and possible sub-topics such as water, social entrepreneurship, digitalisation among others) identified in the UfM Youth Strategy and in the Youth Action Plan 2023 toward a full empowerment of youth in the decision-making process. Each thematic WG will be managed by the UfM with the support of a thematic expert and will gather decision-makers, young people, youth-focused CSOs, and representatives of the academia and entrepreneurial domain with the aim of promoting co-participated policy-making processes. These policy recommendations will be presented in an event gathering the different stakeholders.

iii) Civil protection

Third meeting of the regional dialogue platform on civil protection

The meeting of the UfM platform will take place after the fourth meeting of the Directors-General for Civil Protection of the UfM member countries, which is held back-to-back with the Directors-General for Civil Protection of the EU Member States, 18-19 October 2023 in Valencia, under the Spanish presidency of the Council of the Union. The platform members will take note of the roadmap and the action plan that was discussed at the Directors General meeting to work on its implementation.

iii) Disability

UfM Platform on the Socio-Economic Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities

The UfM Secretariat will strive, under the guidance of its Co-Presidency and member states, to establish a platform based on the 2023 preliminary study conducted by the UfM on social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities in the Euro-Med region and will 1) launch a comparative baseline study covering the full region 2) organize 2 workshops to share good practices and success stories that can be replicated and scaled up 3) agree on the priorities for future actions in collaboration with the main stakeholders of the region, most notably UfM Member States and Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) 4) elaborate the contribution to the Global Disability summit 2025 co-chaired by Germany and Jordan.

The UfM Disability Platform members will work to identify the key priorities for the Ministerial Declaration on Disability rights in 2025/2026. Moreover, the participants of the UfM Regional Platform will 1) review and validate the outcome of the baseline study on inclusion of people with disabilities in the Euro-Mediterranean region 2) provide the technical expertise to prepare the participation of the UfM to the Global Disability Summit in 2025 and 3) will be involved in the preparation of the 3rd UfM Conference on Disability.

3rd Euro-Med Conference on Disability to be organized in 2024

The Conference will aim to 1) review and discuss the results of the comparative baseline study on disability rights in the region, 2) identify the opportunities for enhancing the social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities 3) to define the key policy recommendations for the Global Disability Summit in 2025.

2.4. TRANSPORT AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

i) Transport

UfM Regional Platform on Transport and its Working Groups: follow-up, monitoring, and evaluation of the RTAP

- In coordination with the UfM Co-Presidency, the UfM Secretariat will support the organisation of up to **two rounds of meetings of the UfM Regional Platform on Transport Connectivity and its thematic Working Groups on Land, Air and Maritime Transport and Logistics**, with a view to ensuring the follow up, monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the new RTAP.
- By the end of 2024, the Regional Platform will deliver a **mid-term review of the RTAP**. The initial list of performance indicators set out for each action in the RTAP will provide a first basis for this exercise.

Meetings of the UfM-IFIs Transport Finance Committee

- Up to two meetings of the **UfM-IFIs Transport Finance Committee** will be convened in order to involve IFIs and donors within the framework of the UfM governance structure/UfM regional policy dialogue structure on transport. The meetings will discuss, in particular, the UfM pipeline of projects emerging in relation to the RTAP. The meetings will be an opportunity to present the RTAP to IFIs and donors and, conversely, they will allow UfM Members States to learn about the funding programmes in relation to the different actions of the RTAP and their financing needs.

Additional UfM Secretariat support to the implementation of the RTAP

With regard to the first pillar, regulatory reform and convergence in all transport sectors, the UfM Secretariat will prioritise its work on two transport sub-sectors covered by the RTAP, namely i) ports and maritime transport and ii) urban transport and mobility.

- The UfM Secretariat will organise **regional events**, including Multiregional Technical Assistance and Information Exchange (TAIEX) events, open to the participation of key regional and international stakeholders (including Intergovernmental Organisations – IGOs, Non-Governmental Organisations - NGOs, academia IFIs, donors and private sector), to raise awareness, amplify the outreach and impact on the ground, exchange best practices, build capacity, and discuss/develop recommendations related to the implementation of specific actions under the two priority policy areas, in particular those addressing Motorways of the Sea, ports as energy hubs, regulatory reform and convergence, sustainable urban mobility plans, and related infrastructure investment needs.
- Some of these events may be co-organised with partner organisations such as GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), the International Transport Summit (ITF) at the OECD, MEDports Association, the Association of the Mediterranean Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASCAME) and the International Association of Public Transport (UITP), building on the successful cooperation in previous years.

Regarding the second pillar, the transport connectivity network in the Mediterranean, the UfM Secretariat will continue to support efforts to conclude the validation process for the extension of the TEN-T in the Mediterranean region, as recommended by UfM Member States' Transport Ministers in 2023. It will do so through:

- The organisation of **events** aiming, *inter alia*, to raise awareness on the benefits of enhancing transport connectivity in the region, present the revised TEN-T methodology, showcase related financial mechanisms, etc.
- Commissioning a **study on transport connectivity** to assess and inform policymaking on the potential added value (i.e. economic impact, as well as social and other possible benefits) of extending the TEN-T to the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries, with the support of the GIZ through the UfM Hub for Jobs, Trade and Investment. Accompanying specific **discussions** with the regional partners on the process for the extension of the TEN-T to each respective country.
- Participating in the “Connecting Europe Days 2024” (former “TEN-T Days”).

Joint activities with relevant international and regional stakeholders for a more effective ownership and implementation of regional agendas, building on established and consolidated UfM partnerships

The UfM will also consolidate and **build strategic partnerships** with key regional and international stakeholders in the transport sector (including IGOs, NGOs, academia IFIs, donors and private sector) with a view to:

- Engage with them in the UfM regional policy dialogue structure on transport, and in the preparation of regional transport projects.
- Develop joint activities connected either directly to the transport field, or to cross-cutting issues (such as gender mainstreaming, climate change and environment, disaster risk prevention and management), particularly to help mobilize investment in sustainable transport infrastructure and services.
- Participate in and contribute to major events at regional and global level related to SDG 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), and SDG 17 (partnerships for the Goals).
- Building on exchanges established in previous years, coordination meetings will be held with key stakeholders to better structure the joint activities and to agree on common action plans, the International Road Federation (IRF), the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the Agence Française de Développement (AFD), the International Association of Ports and Harbors (IAPH), the Arab Academy of Science, Technology and Maritime Transport (AASTMT), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), the African Union Commission (AUC), and the Groupement des Industries Marocaines Aéronautiques et Spatiales (GIMAS).

In particular, the following joint activities are envisaged for 2024:

- **2024 International Transport Forum (ITF) Summit and ITF Consultation Day with International Organizations (within the framework of the joint Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) UfM/ITF/OECD)**

The UfM Secretariat will contribute to the 2024 Summit of the International Transport Forum (ITF/OECD) on “Greening Transport: Keeping focus in times of crisis” (22-24 May 2024, Leipzig, Germany), as well as in the ITF Consultation Day with International Organizations (January 2024, Paris, France), for the preparation of the Summit.

- **13th edition of the MARLOG International Conference on Maritime Transport and Logistics**

The UfM Secretariat will be a co-organizer of the 13th edition of the MARLOG International Conference on Maritime Transport and Logistics titled “Towards Smart Green Blue Infrastructure”, which will take place on 3-5 March 2024 in Alexandria, Egypt, hosted by Arab Academy for Science Technology and Maritime Transport (AASTMT).

- **2024 MEDports Forum**

The UfM Secretariat will support the organization of the 2024 MEDports Forum (date and venue TBC). The Annual Medports Forum provides a valuable opportunity to exchange knowledge, build on existing synergies and explore opportunities for cooperation with potential partners and stakeholders in the port and maritime sectors.

- **37th Session of the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe – UNECE**

The UfM Secretariat will contribute to the 37th Session of the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe – UNECE (*date TBC in September 2024, Geneva, Switzerland*), under the agenda point “Development of transport networks and/or links: (e) Transport in the Mediterranean Region”.

- **Expert Group meetings of the GTMO 5+5 (Groupe des ministres de transports de la Méditerranée Occidentale) and GTMO 5+5 Ministerial Conference**

The UfM Secretariat will participate, with observer status, in the Expert Group meetings of the GTMO 5+5 Policy Dialogue on Transport (*dates and venues TBC*), as well as, in the next GTMO 5+5 Ministerial Conference to be held in 2024 (*location and date tbc*).

ii) **Urban Development**

- **The UfM Regional Platform on Sustainable Urban Development** will be convened to follow up on the mandate of the Third Ministerial Conference and review the tasks of the UfM Working Groups (WGs) accordingly.
- **The UfM Thematic Working Groups** on “Urban Transformation” and “Affordable and Sustainable Housing”, the UfM Permanent Working Group on “Evaluation, Monitoring and Reporting Systems on Sustainable Urban Development”, as well as the UfM-IFIs Urban Project Committee, will be reconvened in the form of thematic meetings.
- In addition, events, workshops, and capacity-building activities will be organized to support the implementation process of the UfM Strategic Urban Development Action Plan 2040 and its Housing Action Plan.

The activities under the different action plans are detailed here below:

- The UfM will look at possibilities and partnerships to organise meetings with the aim to promote knowledge transfer, and regional coordination and cohesion of National Urban Policies (NUPs) and Integrated City Development Strategies (ICDSs), as well as national Housing strategies, across the Euro-Mediterranean region..
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- As part of the work within the UfM Thematic Working Group on “Urban Transformation”, and based on the initial TAIEX meeting organised in June 2023, Sustainable Land Management Instruments for Regulating Coastal Zones will be a theme to be further developed in 2024, with the support of UN-Habitat, the Mediterranean Action Plan of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP-MAP), and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Activities in 2024 will aim at continuing improving the understanding and the capacity of key stakeholders on how to develop effective policy and legal frameworks for integrated coastal zone management to promote the adoption of more effective urban policy and urban legal-regulatory instruments necessary to meet the challenges of coastal sustainability and resilience in the face of climate emergency. The final aim is to produce one comparative analysis that will highlight different approaches used by the countries to deal with coastal management linked to the urban context.
- As part of the UfM Thematic Working Group on Affordable and Sustainable Housing and as a follow to the event co-organized in June 2023 under the umbrella of the International Social Housing Festival held in Barcelona, the WG could take up for discussion the setup and different roles that National Housing Agencies can play.
- In line with the UfM Strategic Urban Development Action Plan 2040 to promote and support urban planning/design education and capacity building, the meeting of **Schools of Architecture and Urban Planning** of UfM Member States initiated in Barcelona in May 2022, with the follow-up meetings in Ankara (Dec 22) and Tirana (May 23), is currently working on joint projects on COST, ERASMUS + and a Student Competition. Overall, this meeting aims to support the creation of consortiums of schools from the region to participate in EU calls, an urban design students competition, and joint activities among schools are currently discussed by the group. The competition will be a continuous feature of the Mediterranean Day celebrations in November every year. Meetings Schools of Architecture and Urban Planning of UfM Member States are expected to take place in 2024, to be organized with the support of UNESCO, EC DG EAC, and EC DG RESEARCH, if feasible.
- Meeting of the **WG on Urban Transformation with the theme “Sustainable Urbanisation through Port City Transformation”** could be envisioned in 2024 as the second of three initially foreseen meetings launched in 2022. The aim of the meetings of the port cities is the enhancement of the dialogue and collaboration between public authorities and port authorities in general and on the co-creation of port cities regeneration projects, the dissemination of best practices in the region, and the identification of concrete urban regeneration and port development project ideas to be replicable and developed into bankable projects. The meeting will be co-organized with MedCities, the Association for the Collaboration between Ports and Cities (RETE), the *Association Internationale Villes et Ports* (AIVP), the International Association of Ports and Harbours (IAPH), and MedPorts.

Consider holding a **3rd TAIEX Multi-Regional Workshop on Energy Efficiency in Buildings** will be explored seeking maximum synergy with the EC-funded regional projects MeetMED and the PEEB-MED. This will follow the first Multi-Regional Workshop hosted by the Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda of Spain in July 2022 and the second one hosted by the Ministry of the Ecological Transition in France in October 2023. The aim of the multi-regional Workshop is to present the experience of an EU country on energy renovation in the building sector and to exchange information with the beneficiary countries about lessons learned and challenges for the future.

- As a follow up the **collaboration with WHO** on the joint webinar series 2021-2022, the results of which were circulated at the UfM Ministerial Meeting on Sustainable Urban Development in Zagreb on 4 May 2023, potential actions addressing sustainable solutions will be explored and promoted to rise up to environmental and health challenges of air, soil, noise, and water pollution in human settlements. To this end, best practices will be encouraged and showcased.

UfM Permanent Working Group on Evaluation, Monitoring, and Reporting of Sustainable Urban Development will continue elaborating on available cooperation frameworks, facilitating capacity development for better SDG monitoring, promoting the adoption of common definitions and methodology, and coordination of national statistical systems, with the support of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) and Joint Research Centre (JRC), as well as EU agencies, such as the Eurostat and the European Space Agency (ESA) (with regard to Earth observation data, tools, and toolboxes). Healthy city indicators for human settlements, will be promoted, with the aim to continue exploring sustainable solutions and environmental and health challenges of air, soil, noise, and water pollution in human settlements.

2.5. WATER, ENVIRONMENT AND BLUE ECONOMY

i) Water

Increased knowledge on integrated water resources management and the tools and resources available to attain water security is crucial for building a more resilient, just, sustainable, and habitable society. The UfM Secretariat will focus on enhancing the understanding of the role of private sector in water investments, increasing the understanding of the socio-economic value of water, and promoting a nexus approach to water sector financing as better access to clean water, sanitation services and water management creates tremendous opportunity for the poor and is a progressive strategy for economic growth. The activities and studies here-below described are meant at putting in place the right platform for cross-sectorial cooperation and cross-fertilisation in a regional context.

In 2024 The UfMS will continue forging the pathway towards building a solid platform of mutual understanding bringing together different stakeholders effectively by promoting regional dialogue through a series of activities. These activities will be undertaken to advance the implementation of both the UfM Water Strategy and the Financial Strategy.

The UfM Water Agenda

- Organize a Water Expert Group (WEG) meeting
- Hold Task Force meetings for the priority work areas of the UfM Water Agenda
- Assist in the preparation of the 5th Mediterranean water forum, organized in Tunisia on 5-7 February to prepare the region for the 10th edition of the World Water Forum (WWF10).
- Continue the efforts to identify more sustainable WEFEE and water and climate projects in the Med region
- Possibility of co-organize with UNCCD a side event during the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) COP16 (Saudi Arabia) on youth entrepreneurship in the water sector
- Organize events to promote the food security in the region under the MoU signed with IOFS (Islamic Organization for Food Security)
- Cooperate with the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM) and PRIMA on the WEFEE nexus to help better prove the concept through applied science and better link water security with food system and Food security and enhance the new Circular Water paradigm.

The UfM Financial Strategy for Water

Since 2018 the UfM Secretariat has put in place a UfM Water Finance Programme that has comprised several high-level events and publications (i.e., policy briefs) to create increased understanding of the policy reforms needed in the area of water finance and investment to support achievement of global, regional and national water goals. To continue under this pathway, the UfM Secretariat plans to hold in 2024 several activities that will increment not only the understanding but also the engagement of UfM member states in supporting the necessary policy changes to achieve their water sustainable goals.

- 5th edition of the EU-UfM Water Investment and Policy Forum in the margin of the Cairo Water Week. Or to pave the way to organize the second UFM Water investment forum focusing on Western Balkan in coordination with the Creative forum and to keep the MENA/Cairo event

- Support the Water financial strategy, including holding International and National Consultation on the Role of Private sector, link Water investment on Wastewater and desalination with the Mediterranean financial and governance initiatives, including the Blue Mediterranean initiatives by the EU, as well as the water and climate investment initiative with COP 27, COP28, COP16 BIODIVERSITY, BARCELONA CONVENTION COP23, etc.

Under joint Water and Urban Development portfolio:

In the framework of the **UNESCO and UN-Habitat programme on oasis in the Arab countries**, organize an event targeting UfM countries. The conference will focus on the linkages between water management and urban development in the framework of such specific and delicate settings as oasis.

ii) Environment

The specific objective of 2024 is to continue promoting a multi-stakeholders approach through dialogue, exchange and engagement of countries and stakeholders as follows:

- Organise one annual meeting of the multi-stakeholders UfM Environment (ENV) Task Force and one annual meeting of the UfM Working Group on Environment and Climate Change, which the UfM ENV Task Force is part of, as main channel of regional dialogue, covering the policy and technical aspects;
- Collaborate with a wide range of stakeholders, continue ensuring the multi-stakeholders implementation of the GreenerMed agenda, including capacity building, convergence alignment and coordination of technical and financial resources deployed by different actors in order to address the priority axes under section 1.5.
- Regularly update the UfM Environment webpage, to ensure sharing and dissemination of most updated information among stakeholders and promote a multi-stakeholders approach.
- Linking the Green-Med agenda to the regional and global frameworks by holding a preparatory meeting and participating to the COP16 on biodiversity.

iii)) Blue economy

In 2024, multi-stakeholders participation will be maintained and strengthened through the following:

- Hold one, possibly two, annual meetings of the UfM Working Group on Blue Economy as main channel of regional dialogue, covering the policy and technical aspects.
- Organize the 2nd UfM Stakeholders Conference on Sustainable Blue Economy, in the first quarter of 2024.
- Continue promoting and expanding the Med Blue Economy Platform, as regional multi-stakeholder's platform for sharing technical and sectorial knowledge; networking; and promote partnerships.
- Participation in the BlueMed Group of Senior Officials (GSO)/Mission Restore our Oceans meetings, events and activities, linking with the UfM Water, Blue economy with other dossier and ensure coordinated approach with EU funds to the region from different Directorate Generals.
- Ensure follow up and implementation of the UfM contribution to the Blue Med Partnership and other relevant Blue Economy initiatives such as PAMEX/PLIFF, Blue Mediterranean Initiative, etc. as well as enhance the role of the private sector as per the Ministerial declaration on SBE.

2.6. ENERGY AND CLIMATE ACTION

i) Energy

- The three **UfM Energy Platforms (UfM Regional Electricity Markets Platform, UfM Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Platform, and UfM Gas Platform)** were established in 2015, with the aim of addressing the important energy challenges facing the region. The meeting gathers UfM Member States' representatives as well as regional energy sector stakeholders, which provides a good opportunity for discussions and view exchange on energy issues in the region. The UfM will organise the next annual meetings of the UfM Energy Platforms in 2024 to showcase to the Co-Presidency, Member States and sector stakeholders the progress made in the implementation of activities and actions planned in the Roadmap for Action including progress on energy efficiency measures carried out by both Member States and Mediterranean stakeholders.
- The UfM will hold **interim meetings** of the **Energy Platforms** to review the implementation of the roadmap for action on energy. The meetings will be organised with each platform throughout the year (frequency to be determined in collaboration with the Co-presidency and the stakeholders of the platforms).
- **UfM engagement in the EU's endeavour to launch an EU Initiative for the development of a Mediterranean Grid Code**
The UfM in collaboration with Mediterranean-Transmission System Operators (Med-TSO) and Mediterranean Energy Regulators (MEDREG), accompanies the EU initiative for the development of a Mediterranean grid code to secure compatibility with European Union rules and facilitate regional electricity interconnection. There should be a series of meetings gathering DG NEAR at EU commission, the UfM, and the stakeholders to develop a regulatory and financial framework for interconnection in the Mediterranean. The initiative should in a later stage be circulated for adoption among the member states.

ii) **Climate Action**

- Plan and facilitate annual high-level discussions in the framework of the **Climate Change Expert Group** meetings, ensuring active participation of youth representatives to foster renewed engagement and secure their contributions to the decision-making processes.
- Organise the **Energy and Climate Business Forum** to support and showcase private sector stakeholders' efforts towards a sustainable energy transition, by providing a networking space and promoting innovative and tangible financing solutions, as well as private investment and public-private partnerships in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The Forum will offer a high-level platform for solution developers from public and private sectors and academia dealing with challenges in energy efficiency, renewable energy and climate action.
- Ensuring synergies with Energy and Environment activities implemented by sectorial UfM teams and external partners through the shared **Working Group on Environment and Climate Action** and promoting synergies with the **Energy Platforms** during the annual meetings.
- Actively participate to events and forums organised by the UNFCCC such as COP29, the subsidiary body meetings and the Middle East North Africa (MENA) Climate Week. Contribute to events led by relevant regional stakeholders (i.e. MedCoP) and Member States. The UfM actions in these forums aim to promote a Mediterranean agenda for climate action and energy in the global agenda, reinforce and animate a structured regional dialogue, with regional organisations, financial institutions, civil society, youth organizations, private sector and experts and showcase projects and initiatives in the region.

3. Implementing increased initiatives and projects for tangible regional impact on the ground

The UfM Secretariat acts as a catalyst of projects, promoting initiatives with concrete impact on the ground to enhance tangibly an inclusive and sustainable development across the Euro-Mediterranean area, notably building on partnerships to capitalize on synergies in the region.

3.1. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT

i) Economic development

- The **UfM Grant Scheme for the Promotion of Inclusive Digital Trade** will be launched to support and increase the participation of SMEs, cooperatives, entrepreneurs, social enterprises, and business communities in e-commerce, with a particular focus on business organizations led and operated by women. The Grant Scheme intends in particular to identify and address the challenges SMEs and other business organizations face in e-commerce through training and capacity-building measures.
- **The 2nd UfM Workshop on Economic Diplomacy**
The UfM Secretariat will explore the organization of a second edition of the UfM Workshop on Economic Diplomacy, targeting young diplomats from the UfM region, with the aim of providing them with skills on key macroeconomic issues including trade and investment, industrial cooperation and economic integration.
- **Technical training on sustainable investment**
The UfM Secretariat will provide technical trainings to investment promotion agencies (IPAs) aimed at introducing the participants to the modalities of sustainable investment and the clauses related to trade and the creation of jobs, as well as what relates to environment and climate issues. It will also cover the sustainability aspect of investment decisions.
- **Progress Report on Regional Integration in the UfM Region**
The UfM Secretariat will work on the preparation of the 2nd edition of the Progress Report on Regional Integration in the UfM Region, monitoring the five domains of economic integration featured in the 1st edition (published in May 2021), namely trade, finance, infrastructure, research and higher education, as well as movement of people.
- **Technical assistances:**
 1. **Technical Assistance on Food Supply Chains**
The discussions during the UfM High Level Conference on food industry for food security have demonstrated the promising opportunities to promote regional food value chains. In this regard, the UfM Secretariat will task a qualified expert with producing a study on the state of play of regional food value chains and what can be done to further strengthen them. The requested document will inform our future work for better targeted and concrete actions.
 2. **Technical Assistance on Digital Transformation**
This technical assistance aims at producing a report analyzing the state-of-play, -including opportunities, challenges and best practices- in the MENA Region in terms of e-governance in order to inform the UfM Secretariat's work on promoting digitalization, given its potential for job creation and for streamlining services. This comes as well as a follow-up to the request expressed by the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs at the 5th UfM Regional Forum.

ii) Employment

- The **UfM Grant Scheme to Promote Employment and Entrepreneurship in the Green Economy** will be implemented during 2024, This Grant Scheme's global objective is to support the green transformation of the Southern Mediterranean economies with a view of supporting employment promotion in the green economy.

The Grant Scheme is especially targeted to benefit vulnerable groups, which are disproportionately affected by the consequences of climate change and the related changing socio-economic landscape. It intends to tackle regional challenges through local solutions that can be adapted and continued beyond its duration. In addition, with this Grant Scheme, the UfM pursues its mandate to foster entrepreneurship-friendly environments in its Member States.

- The **Mediterranean Initiative for Jobs (Med4Jobs)** remains to be the key pipeline of projects aiming at creating jobs, improving employability prospects for young people and women, and supporting startups. Consultations will continue with the promoters of UfM-labelled projects under the umbrella of Med4Jobs to explore the possibility of scaling up or replicating some of the best practices, as well as addressing bottlenecks and impediments.
- **Trainings on green entrepreneurship**
In implementation of the outcomes of the UfM Workshop on “Green Economy Promotion: how to make green economy work for sustainable development and regional integration?” held in Algiers on 15 December 2022, two training workshops will be organized on green entrepreneurship to build the capacities of young people so they can make their own green businesses thrive.

3.1 HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

i) Higher Education

- **Regional initiative on Green Skills for Post-Secondary Pathways.**
Regional initiative to promote the development of green skills in post-secondary pathways, which might include the following concrete actions: co-creation of curricula, including in collaboration with technology institutes and engineering schools; promotion of collaborations with the platforms of centres of vocational training; promotion of gender equality in green jobs, since newly emerging occupations are not gender stereotyped. Participation of Second Chance Schools from the MedNC network, as the initiative could also be used to develop concrete vocational education and training proposals for upskilling or reskilling unemployed graduates.
- **Study on Digital Education in the Mediterranean.**
Launching a study aimed at mapping the current situation of digital education in higher education in the region, presenting best practices and recommendations based on the priorities of the Ministerial Declaration (early 2024 TBD) and the conclusions of the Public Consultation in view of the 1st UfM Ministerial Conference on Higher Education (2024 TBD). Digital education has been at the centre of the higher education agenda for years, and the pandemic suddenly increased the speed at which digital is changing education. Nevertheless, digital education in higher education is still seldom a widespread practice, and transitioning to digital education at scale is complex.
- **Follow Up on the Gender Equality Plan in STEM Mediterranean Universities** (see Social and Civil Affairs section)
- **In partnership with the European Investment Bank (EIB) Institute, UfMS will continue providing training to Southern Mediterranean Universities** on the EU development cooperation and financial framework to the South Mediterranean, and the effects of Euro-Mediterranean policies.

The UfM will increase the number of labelled projects, especially related to the agreed six priorities under the UfM Ministerial Declaration on Higher Education.

ii) Research and innovation

In order to support the green transition through research, knowledge, and skills, while promoting the employability of researchers, students and graduates, UfMS is implementing actions on green innovation and employability, in order to foster an environment conducive towards employability, careers and entrepreneurship, on fields in line with the three UfM R&I priority themes. Activities will include trainings, conferences, and publications on the academia-business interconnection, and on the inclusion of green competences and skills of researchers and graduates. Particularly, this could entail:

- a) a **Regional Conference** to capitalize on the results of past action on **green innovation and employability** and set the scene for next steps.
This action will follow the Forum on Green Innovation and Employability held in Amman in October 2022 and will partner with regional actors such as UN institutions, EU Commission/Delegations, and regional networks.
- b) **workshops on the skills and knowledge for the sustainable transition**, on fields associated with the UfM Research and Innovation agendas, such as food systems, water, and energy.
- c) A **Workshop on Green skills inclusion in academic curricula** on the field of renewable energy is foreseen in partnership with ETF, following a similar workshop on food security scheduled to be held in November 2023. dedicated studies to enrich the dialogue.
Studies exploring the **pipeline between research and job market/startup creation** could be launched, continuing pilot actions developed in 2023 both at national and regional levels.

Building on 2022 Ministerial Dialogues on Food security, UfM will explore supporting initiatives on **food security** based on research and innovation, particularly on delivering on the so-called “last mile of research”, connecting PRIMA projects with the business community.

UfMS will further engage in the activities of the inter-institutional platform (Sustainable Food System in the Mediterranean - SFSMed) joining UfM with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and CIHEAM, with the participation of PRIMA, promoting knowledge and green skills for food systems, and on overall approach on science diplomacy.

Science diplomacy will continue being a central pillar of UfM activities on research and innovation, with follow up actions, trainings, conferences, and capacity building action that implement the results of a foreseen Euro-Mediterranean Conference on Science Diplomacy. Efforts will be launched to prepare the ground for Science Diplomacy centres and/or networks at Euro-Mediterranean level.

UfM will continue supporting its research-related projects such as BlueSkills and “Higher Education on Food Security and Rural Development”, promoting a reflection on their status and continuation. Particularly, a partnership with CIHEAM on the PhD MedForum will be strengthened, including through possible co-organization of the recurring biannual conference.

3.2 SOCIAL AND CIVIL AFFAIRS

i) Women Empowerment

- **Implementation of the pilot project for an incubation online programme for early-stage start-ups in Lebanon:**
The programme is based on the experience of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) **IDEA APP** launched already in nine (9) MENA countries. This incubation tool allows women entrepreneurs to validate their business model and be in touch with personal mentors through hybrid training on recycling plastic and Information and Communication Technology (ICT). There will be follow-up as well of the pilot project in Lebanon launched in 2023 and replication in one or two additional countries. The initiative funded by GIZ is a spin-off of the extensive collaboration between UNIDO and UfM launched in 2015 under the UfM labelled project

PWEII (Promoting Women's Empowerment for Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Development in the MENA region) presented as flagship project at the SOM on May 2023. Collaboration which led to the joint organisation of the last editions of the Women Business Forum and the MENA Women Business Club, among others.

- **Female green and social entrepreneurship:** within the framework of the potential cooperation with the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), the UfM will launch a pilot programme (at national and/or regional level) to support women-led start-ups from the incubation to acceleration stage with the final objective of access to market and to finance. With regard to the relevant sectors, the programme will focus on the green and circular economy and will moreover facilitate the access to new technologies.
- **Nexus Gender, Environment and Climate Change:** a capacity building programme to support women economic empowerment for a sustainable growth (e.g., women for greening Mediterranean food systems, potential for blue entrepreneurship).
- **Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) entrepreneurship.** Outlining two online trainings on education to STEM entrepreneurship and on the use of digital platforms, e-commerce, and fintech to foster women's employment.
- Within the framework of the Mediterranean Tech Women Network (MTWN), the UfM will organize **Ad hoc mentorship support and training** to create economic opportunities for women through networking and community support, advocate for women's issues, promote the success stories of women in technology, and encourage female entrepreneurship.
- In line with the main recommendations on boosting gender equality in Higher Education, outlined by the UfM Report on the Public Consultation in view of the 1st UfM Ministerial Conference on Higher Education, there will be a **follow Up on the Gender Equality Plan in STEM Mediterranean Universities**. Ensuring the follow-up and replication of the trainings implemented together with the Network for Mediterranean Engineering and Management Schools (RMEIM) in universities working on STEM on how to integrate a gender mainstream within their work and research.
- **Training for women-led businesses in social economy.** An online training for 30 women working in social economy which will be provided with soft and technical skills for business-management in the framework of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) (based on the main recommendations outlined in the 2023 policy brief on female entrepreneurship in social economy).
- **Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG):** capacity building programme targeting public services and CSOs in order to develop and adopt a common toolkit to prevent VAWG and to support women survivors of violence with the support of projects' promoters such as the Euromed Feminist Initiative (EFI), the World Health Organisation (WHO) as well as experts from other networks such as UN Women and the WAVE Network (Women Against Violence Europe).

ii) Youth

- **Support young Mediterranean people in accessing opportunities in the social economy sector.** Fostering youth social entrepreneurship in the **Agro-food, ICT, Sustainable Tourism, Handcraft, in Egypt, Tunisia, Lebanon** as pilot countries/sectors. The objective is to promote the role of social economy in providing employment and entrepreneurship opportunities to young people while fostering networking peer-to-peer learning, and exchange of good practices. The aim is to build a multinational network connecting young social entrepreneurs (18-35 years old) of targeted countries with **skills building, access to finance, market-building opportunities, and networking support**.

iii) Civil protection

- **Development and implementation of a Euro-Mediterranean digital platform on civil protection.** In the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean's Regional Dialogue Platform on Civil Protection, which aims at promoting and supporting Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, the purpose is to design, develop, and implement, a collaborative IT/digital platform in the field of civil protection/defence, and in particular in disaster risk management and disaster risk reduction.

It is intended to conceive a Euro-Mediterranean cooperation mechanism that will be discussed and elaborated within the framework of the Horizon 2030 strategy, anchored in the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM).

This platform shall be a tool for sharing knowledge, and contribute to strengthening prevention, preparedness and capacity response, covering the DRM (Disaster Risk Management) and possibly DRR (Disaster Risk Reduction) phases, in the Euro-Mediterranean area. The results of the three working groups on "prevention" "preparedness" and "response" of the UfM regional dialogue platform on civil protection could be integrated into this platform, which will be accessible on the web, through a specific website, or through the UfM website (<https://ufmsecretariat.org/platform/ufm-regional-platform-on-civil-protection/>).

- **Implementation phase of the PPRD Med Project (Prevention, Preparedness and Response to natural and man-made disasters), 2023-2025, EU funded (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations - DG ECHO).** The general objective of PPRD Mediterranean is to increase the resilience to natural and manmade disasters in the Southern Neighbourhood countries (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia) and the Mediterranean region by reinforcing the cooperation and partnership between the EU and Mediterranean countries under the umbrella of the UfM.

iv) Disability

- In 2024 the UfM will provide technical support to the Spanish National Organisation of Blind people (ONCE) Social Group Project "Intégration des jeunes et des femmes en situation de handicap à travers l'emploi dans le secteur des voyages et du tourisme" in Morocco. Moreover, UfM will focus on the phase II of the comparative study on the socio-economic inclusion of persons with disabilities in the Mediterranean region, in order to cover all the countries of the MENA region.

3.3 TRANSPORT AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

i) Transport

- **Monitoring and supporting UfM-labelled projects**

The UfM Secretariat will continue monitoring and supporting, on a regional level, the implementation of the current UfM-labelled transport projects (i.e. the Completion of the Central Section of the Trans-Maghreb Motorway Axis Project and the Jordan National Railway Project - JNRP), while updating and developing the overall project pipeline, in consultation and cooperation with UfM Member States and IFIs, to enhance regional transport connectivity under the new RTAP.

- **Steering Committee meetings of EU funded projects supporting the implementation of the RTAP**

The Implementation of the new RTAP will continue to involve EU support, including through the relevant European Agencies (European Maritime Safety Agency - EMSA, European Union Aviation Safety Agency - EASA, European agency for Railways - ERA).

The UfM Secretariat will contribute, in technical capacity, to the Steering Committee meetings of the ongoing regional Technical Assistance (TA) Transport Projects financed by the European Commission in the fields of maritime transport (SAFEMED), road and urban transport (Euromed Transport Support Project – ETSP), and air transport (Euromed Aviation), as well as any new initiative including Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in the field of transport, to ensure that the Projects contribute to the implementation of the RTAP.

- **Joint initiatives with the International Association of Public Transport (UITP) in implementation of the joint MoU:**

- Technical assistance and capacity building initiatives to implement the new RTAP;

- Follow up of COP 27 initiatives, Low Carbon Transport for Urban Sustainability (LOTUS) and Sustainable Urban Resilience for the next Generation (SURGE), co-led by UITP;
- Communication campaigns to promote the benefits of public transport among the ministries of transport in the Mediterranean region.
- **Joint initiatives with the International Road Federation (IRF)**
 - Capacity building / Training activities on Road Safety.
 - Workshop to exchange with regional and global partners on best practices on national lead agencies for road safety.
 - Participation at and contribution to next IRF World Congress in 2024 (Istanbul, Türkiye).

Reinforcing women’s leadership as well the need for dedicated investments in women’s skills in the transport sector, will be integrated as relevant dimension in the joint initiatives to ensure that women have access to transport professions and that they can participate effectively in the planning and implementation of strategies and policies as well as in the management and operation of transport networks and services.

ii) **Urban Development**

In 2024 the UfMS will promote the design of integrative strategic projects for cities in the Euro-Mediterranean region in a set of thematic axes of intervention, implementing common frameworks for project management.

Sustainable, resilient, and integrative urban development initiatives and projects underway in the region, in particular those with the UfM label, will be identified, recognized, and promoted, as appropriate, as examples of tools to reach the agreed objectives of the UfM action plans.

Key IFIs, as well as international development cooperation agencies, will be kept abreast of the emerging project ideas and proposals in the UfM project pipeline and encouraged to support bankable projects within the UfM governance set-up.

Training on funding opportunities for public officials could also be organized under the aegis of the UfM-IFIs Urban Project Committee.

In 2024, the UfM Secretariat will aim to implement this objective as an essential vehicle for mobilizing and sharing knowledge, expertise, technology, and financial resources, and to engage key regional stakeholders in the implementation of the UfM Action plans.

In this context, the UfM Secretariat will participate in relevant activities of key stakeholders, including, in particular those concerning the European Commission, UN-Habitat, Housing Europe, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Medcities, OECD, or UNECE among others.

The second edition of the one-week training course on **Shiraka Programme Citizen Engagement in Urban Development**, will be implemented in 2024, financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and supported by UfM. The first course took place successfully in the Hague, on 8-12 May 2023. The course aims to inspire the participants with innovative projects in good governance, spatial justice, and resilient and inclusive cities. Practical examples from The Netherlands serve as an inspiration and motivation for new initiatives on citizen engagement in urban development in the target (UfM Arab) countries.

The UfM programme on **Traditional Building Skills in the South Mediterranean** was launched in June 2023 which proposes an approach to cultural heritage based on dialogue and stakeholder cooperation where planning for tourism and heritage management is integrated at a destination level, with cultural assets being valued and protected,

developing sustainable tourism and increasing jobs opportunities. The programme is implemented in cooperation with UNESCO and with the financial support of GIZ. In 2024, two 3-days workshops at a national level, targeting stakeholders in Algeria and Mauritania could be organised as a follow-up to the activities conducted in 2023.

In addition, events will be organized on the margins of the International Social Housing Festival (Dublin, May/June 2024), the Smart city Expo World Congress (Barcelona, Nov 2024) and the World Urban Forum (Cairo, Nov 2024).

3.5 WATER, ENVIRONMENT AND BLUE ECONOMY

i) Water

The UfM Secretariat will continue its work to promote and facilitate projects that have a positive impact on local and regional level and develop partnerships that can capitalize on the opportunities that the region has to offer. To endorse this vision the following activities are foreseen in 2024:

- Supporting the advancement, in the framework of the UfM – Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) cooperation new agreement, of WEFE Nexus for Sustainable Development in MENA (The WEFE Knowledge Hub): Proofing the WEFE Nexus concept in related job creation, implemented by Inter-Islamic Network on Water Resources Development and Management (INWRDAM), in coordination with the implementation of the UfM Water Agenda.
- Technical interventions on WEFE and Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and Non-conventional Water Resources fields
- Supporting the advancement of the labelled project Smart DESERT (Smart Development of Eco-Friendly Solutions and Economic Regional Agricultural Techniques).
- Supporting the advancement of the labelled project Mediterranean Water Knowledge Platform
- Promote the international cooperation on integrated water resources management (IWRM), with special attention to the role of women in water diplomacy
- Implement the Water and Youth engagement strategy's work plan
- Elaborate and design a capacity building programme with GCF (Green Climate Fund) on water and climate finance.
- Promote activities to support and increase private sector investments in the water sector.
- Supporting activities related to the mitigation of the climate change effects in the water sector ((flash)flood and drought management, natural water retention, etc,)
- Supporting the implementation of project related to the SDG 6. implementation with special attention to drinking water and sanitation and the role of women and children.
- Follow up the implementations of the observatory of the Non-Conventional Water Resource NCWR and its associated renewable energies in its first pilot area located within the Mediterranean-Sahel Region.
- The deployment of the digitalization in the water sector at a regional level with different partners. Digital technologies especially are key enablers to achieve this modernization. Building on the work carried out in 2023 to identify WEFE and entrepreneurial activities and projects in the Euro-Mediterranean region and water digitalization (to launch a roadmap towards digitalization of the water sector in the Euro-Mediterranean region).
- Use of renewable energy in the water utility sector.
- The above might lead to cooperative solutions to tackle our water-related regional challenges, stressing the need to put in place a resilient and inclusive water system to achieve a Water-Smart Society and smart water cities in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Interlinkages between digitalization, water security and water efficiency, and cities: Ensure that the Mediterranean Water Knowledge Platform is in place including Support from AECID, Entrepreneurship Experts in the Water Sector (CEWAS) and Sida.
- Enhance the technical capacity and help scaling up the results from the fund-forwarding to INWRDAM and Global Water Partnership (GWP)-Med.

Under joint Water and Urban Development portfolio:

In collaboration with IUCN and UNEP-MAP, contribute to the **Capacity Building Programme on Land Management Instruments for Regulating Coastal** through technical support in order to produce materials such as:

- Country reports covering land management instruments
- One comparative analysis that will highlight different approaches used by the countries to deal with coastal management
- Guidance note on how to integrate and improve coastal zone management with NUPs
- Capacity development materials
- Advocacy and outreach products

ii) Environment

Continue supporting the initiatives and portfolio in the Euro-Mediterranean region by:

- Keeping on tracking programmes/activities supporting the GreenerMed priorities; update regularly the GreenerMed list of supported projects; promoting transfer and capitalization of results;
- Ensuring targeted support and alignment with UfM labelled and GreenerMed associated projects, as appropriate (Interreg EuroMed Governance Projects; Plastic Busters CAP; TouMali project; Med4Waste; the Paris Agreement in Action; Bluemed/Mission Restore Our Ocean/Mediterranean Lighthouse; EU funded Water and Environment Support Programme; etc);
- Ensure targeted support to other labelled projects and GreenerMed supported projects, as appropriate; the Coordinated Support Action of Bluemed/Mission/Lighthouse and define operational collaboration; detail the annual EU funded Water Environment Support (WES) to the UfM GreenerMed Agenda;
- Enhance coordination with IFIs; Development cooperation Agencies to facilitate investment opportunities, integrating ecosystem restoration as new essential approach and maintaining climate change and environmental and ecological degradation fighting measures intertwined.
- Coordinate with all stakeholders to better organize and engage organizations from both shore of the Mediterranean as well to enhance the policy influences in the environmental axes by producing policy papers, webinars, etc from different resources including Sida, GIZ and others.

iii) Blue Economy

- Continue to comprehensively implement the roadmap identified for immediate action throughout meeting, high-level round table, webinar and mobilizing technical assistance (facilitating the development of programmes, projects or activities to fill gaps; leveraging funds and financial engineering needed by thematic axes; upscaling to other countries; studies and reports; etc) and/or other actors/donors to cover the identified gaps/needs.
- Following up on the established collaboration with EU Programmes to identify possible areas of funding, in particular Interreg EuroMed and Next Med; as well as the EU funded Mission 'Restore our oceans', cross cutting the environment and sustainable blue economy dossier. Particular attention will be devoted to follow the inter-programme coordination on sustainable tourism.
- Promote sustainable blue finance/investments in shaping new investment programmes/initiatives such as the BMP-Blue Med Partnership, etc as well as with the private sector, including the World Ocean Council.
- Preparing thematic or policy papers/reports/information material or organize or co-organize thematic meetings/conferences in person or online, engaging partners and stakeholders through their contribution and reviews.
- Supporting and contributing to WestMed and EUSAIR (European Strategy of Adriatic Ionian Region) in the wider Mediterranean Sustainable Blue Economy Agenda advancements; advance the West med agenda and build coherence.

3.6 ENERGY AND CLIMATE ACTION

i) Energy

- **Continued support to the UfM labelled projects in the energy sector**
The UfM will continue its support to its labelled projects in the energy sector in the region Clima Med, Tafila wind farm, SEMed Private Renewable Energy framework SPREF.
- **Supporting the development of a regional strategy on hydrogen**
Facilitate the development of a regional strategy for the production, distribution, and use of green hydrogen in the Mediterranean region. This strategy proposes to set clear targets together with the development of a roadmap for achieving these targets including promoting renewable energy sources, securing cross-border collaboration, proposing investment plans, and recommending partnerships with international organizations.
- **Supporting the Mediterranean municipalities through the street lighting exercise (implemented by the Copenhagen Centre on Energy Efficiency)**
Participate in scalable local initiatives in energy efficiency such as providing support to the development and the promotion of activities of the Copenhagen Centre on Energy Efficiency. In collaboration with the centre, prepare a comprehensive action plan to be incorporated in the energy platform action plan. Further coordinate with the European Commission on linking the Centre with finance channels and encourage the partnerships between the Centre and other energy stakeholders such as Regional Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (RCREEE).
- **Capacity-building and creation of uniform standards for training and education in the sector of renewables,** including through the launch of a Uniform Masters in Management of Renewable Energy, in cooperation with the concerned divisions.

ii) Climate Action

- Continued support to the activities of the **Network of Mediterranean Experts on Climate and Environmental Change (MedECC)** including promotion of its activities, review of its legal status, communication of its report and support to its fundraising activities. Technical support to the MedECC will be detailed in the upcoming 2024-2025 contract.
- Continued support to the **ECWMF-Copernicus** in the development of new Apps (i.e. Energy App) and dissemination of information on the current App on the impact of Sea Level rise on the impact of Cultural Heritage sites and the App on the spread of vector borne diseases, including organization of awareness raising events and trainings.
- Support initiatives channelling funds to the region for adaptation and mitigation through the organisation of the **Energy and Climate Business Forum** as well as further engagement on partnerships with donors and Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) and International Financial Institutions (IFIs) from the region. Emphasize activities that promote and empower youth engagement and prioritize gender equality within these initiatives.
- In cooperation with other sectorial divisions, back or develop specific actions for adaptation centred on more vulnerable communities and/or strategic ecosystem services with an initial focus on mountain ecosystems and populations (Food and Agricultural Organisation -FAO) and urban areas (UN Habitat).

3.7 INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

The 2017 UfM Roadmap for Action mandated the UfM to exert all efforts to bridge any potential cultural divide to fight against extremism and all forms of racism and to build upon a common heritage and aspirations. It states that intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the Mediterranean is an important underlying dimension of all regional cooperation activities in the framework of the UfM.

In line with this, the UfMS has launched in recent years two initiatives, namely i) the Day of the Mediterranean; and the ii) the Mediterranean Capitals of Culture and Dialogue.

i) The Day of the Mediterranean

The Day of the Mediterranean provides a yearly opportunity to promote intercultural exchanges, celebrate cooperation, embrace diversity and strengthen ties between the two shores. In 2024, the UfMS will celebrate its fourth edition, mainly through a communication campaign (see section 4.3). Institutional partnerships and relations with other actors celebrating the Day will also be built, in view of raising the maximum awareness around the celebration.

Particular focus will be given to promoting the Day of the Mediterranean in Barcelona, host city for the UfMS Headquarters.

ii) The Mediterranean Capitals of Culture and Dialogue (MCCD)

Following the launch of the Mediterranean Capitals of Culture and Dialogue in 2023, the UfMS, in close cooperation with the ALF, but also the *Assemblée régionale et locale euro-méditerranéenne* (ARLEM), the initiative *Co-développer le Patrimoine Mondial en Méditerranée* (CoPaM-Med) and other territorial networks such as MedCities and UCLG, will:

- Prepare the first edition of the Mediterranean Capitals of Culture & Dialogue in 2025 with the two cities nominated, including in fine-tuning their programme and in following implementation and applying close monitoring. Three meetings will be arranged to follow-up on the preparations (i.e., a preliminary meeting, a mid-year meeting, and a final preparatory meeting). Ad hoc meetings can be set as required. Furthermore, the UfM Secretariat, Anna Lindh Foundation Secretariat and ARLEM will support the two capitals as well through their respective communication teams, including by developing a joint visual identity for the two MCCDs, highlighting cross-cutting actions and strengthening the overall coherence of the initiative and the two programmes, as well as in disseminating the results of the initiative through their wide audiences (media and stakeholders).

- Launch the call for applications for the MCCD 2026: the call will be open from January to June 2024, with the aim of nominating the two 2026 MCCDs in November 2024.

4. Reinforcing the UfM capacity for action

In order to increase UfM capacity to deliver on its mandate, as detailed in the work programme, the Secretariat will continue to build partnerships, optimize allocation of resources and management processes in view of increase operations efficiency and accountability vis-a-vis stakeholders and general public.

4.1 Institutional relations and strategic partnerships

Given the important role that partnerships have in the promotion of the UfM as a platform for regional dialogue and cooperation, and to increase the visibility and impact of its activities in the region, the UfM Secretariat engages in strategic partnerships with key regional stakeholders.

Specific focus is paid to:

i) institutional relations: with key global, regional and sub-regional stakeholders to establish the UfM as a unique multi-stakeholder platform for regional dialogue and cooperation in the Mediterranean.

ii) reinforcing strategic partnerships with key actors involved in regional cooperation to finance UfM initiatives and projects labelled by its Member-States.

i) Institutional relations

First and foremost, the UfM Secretariat holds a natural partnership with the European Union, as co-founder but also as Co-President of the organisation. Indeed, at every level and sector, the European Union and its Commission are among the main interlocutors and partners for the UfM in the region.

Moreover, the UfM ecosystem is not limited to the inter-governmental structure and comprises other institutions and dialogue frameworks bound to the objectives of the Barcelona Process, namely the Anna Lindh Foundation, the Parliamentary-Assembly of the UfM or the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM). With the ALF and ARLEM, the UfMS will particularly enhance its partnership in 2024 around the Mediterranean Capitals of Culture & Dialogue joint initiative, as the three institutions form its Advisory Committee.

The UfM Secretariat will further focus its efforts in 2024 on strengthening strategic institutional partnerships with a set of other identified and potential actors involved in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, namely the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), around its EuroMed Summit, the Council of Europe and the North-South Centre on issues related to youth and gender, the League of Arab States and the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), through the recently signed MoUs, the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO), as well as the CIHEAM, to renew their joint partnership agreement.

The UfMS will also continue enhancing its cooperation with major IFIs and donors in the Euro-Mediterranean region to develop joint initiatives and projects, namely with the EIB through the seconded official to the UfM Secretariat.

In particular, recognizing the value of ocean economy, biodiversity and climate implications, in line with the UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy, the SBE Roadmap and its Working group, the UfM, with the European Commission, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), EIB, AFD, some donor countries (i.e. Spain, Sweden, France) and initially three Beneficiary Partners (Morocco, Egypt and Jordan) have intensified efforts to establish the **Blue Mediterranean Partnership (“BMP”)**. The Partners intend to cooperate in view of establishing the BMP as a platform for coordinating interventions and leveraging financial resources from Implementing Organisations, Beneficiary Partners and Donors Partners to enable Sustainable Blue Economy investments in the non-EU countries of the Mediterranean region, with an initial focus on the three Beneficiary Partners. The BMP seeks to act as a key conduit

to unlocking and mobilising public and private financing, by providing support and enabling investments that have the potential to pull-in the private sector.

The objective is to mobilise donor funding mainly for Technical Assistance, to support investments under the umbrella of the BMP, through a dedicated BMP Fund(s) to be set up and administered by EBRD (the intention is to mobilise a minimum amount of EUR 50 million in donor contributions to start the MBP investments). The BMP is expected to begin its operation as of first January 2024 and for this purpose the Partners are in the process to finalise, and procure their internal approvals for, the design of the legal and operational structure of the BMP by end of 2023. In 2024 the UfM will continue its contribution for the constitution of the BMP and afterwards to its rump up.

Moreover, the UfM Secretariat was granted the status of Observer to the General Assembly of the United Nations in December 2015 and has consistently been engaging with the UN System in a comprehensive effort to guarantee its coherence with and its contribution to the implementation of the SDGs in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The UfMS has developed close partnerships with several UN institutions, which have contributed to the success of UfMS initiatives and events or to the implementation of regional projects of cooperation.

In 2024, the UfMS will focus on enhancing its relations with the UN agencies and institutions with whom it has ongoing joint projects and initiatives, namely the United Nations Development Programme, (UNDP) UNIDO, WHO, FAO, UNEP/MAP, UNCCD, UNFCCC, , UN Water Convention as well as UN Women and the United Nations Alliance Of Civilisations (UNAOC).

Finally, the UfM Secretariat aims at including non-governmental and other actors in the efforts of promoting dialogue and cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean region. It therefore includes NGOs, think-tanks, academia, youth associations, and others, in the regional policy dialogue fora, in its technical platforms or as promoters and partners of the UfM-labelled projects at the operational level.

In 2024, the UfMS will continue enhancing its approach by involving civil society, in particular universities and NGOs, to bring an interesting bottom-up perspective and share their regional analysis, knowledge, experience and proposals to tackle the current challenges, always in close coordination with the governments concerned.

Given the important contribution that they can bring to UfM regional efforts, the Secretariat will continue to widen and deepen its network of institutional and public affairs partnerships with think tanks and research centres throughout the region. A particular focus will be given to cooperation with the Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission (Euromesco) network, building on the close relations established in the last years.

In addition, another focus will be on increasing the involvement of Private Sector in regional policy sectorial dialogues, identifying the priority issues regarding regional economic integration, as well as contributing to projects development and financing.

i) Strategic partnerships

On top of the contribution by the European Commission, as described above, the UfM Secretariat will continue to strengthen established cooperation with key partners and explore new opportunities to leverage our impact in the region through new financial partnerships.

Thanks to the following dedicated contributions, the UfMS will be able in 2024 to develop strategic areas of work, increase its capacity and achieve concrete results:

Partnership with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)

The strategic partnership with Sida, started in 2017, was extended in in July 2020 for an additional period of two years (till December 2022) and, in December 2021, to secure the continuity of the financial contribution of Sida, a new agreement covering the period 2022-2025 was agreed, with a total budget equivalent to € 4,9 million over the 4-year

period. The cooperation between Sida and the UfM Secretariat consists in a programme designed from a Results-Based Management (RBM) perspective, compatible with the mandate of the UfM and the Secretariat yearly work-programmes, geared towards presenting the impact of the Secretariat activities and how the action of the UfM brings changes in the region. In addition, one of the objectives of the renewed cooperation is the institutional development of the Secretariat itself.

In 2024 the UfM Secretariat will implement the 2024 work plan, formulated in coherence with the 2024 Work Programme of the UfM Secretariat, according to the priorities jointly defined with Sida, aiming at enhancing and amplifying UfM regional activities in the MENA countries, in three priority areas of common interest:

- Women Empowerment;
- Water, Environment and Blue Economy;
- Energy and Climate Action.

Partnership with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

From February 2022 to January 2025, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) will continue its ongoing support to the UfM Secretariat under the project “UfM Hub for Jobs, Trade and Investment”.

Under this project, to be implemented by GIZ, 6,5 Mio EUR will be provided to support the activities of the UfM in the area of regional economic integration, employment and investment promotion in the UfM region.

The project objectives for the priority areas of employment, trade and investment are:

- Capacity Development for the UfM Secretariat;
- Development of recommendations for enhanced regional integration via UfM multi-stakeholder dialogues, regional exchanges and training formats;
- Development and implementation of measures in UfM Member States, particularly in North Africa and Middle East.

In addition, under the UfM Transport portfolio, this project will provide financial support to the Study on transport connectivity, and, under the UfM Urban Development portfolio, it will support the Programme on Traditional Building Skills in Southern Mediterranean. Furthermore, it will provide financial support to implement activities aiming at removing barriers to women’s economic, social, financial, and digital inclusion in the Mediterranean region and to foster youth entrepreneurship within the region.

DG MARE/CINEA Grant on Promoting Sustainable Blue economy in the Mediterranean Sea Basin

Building on the successful cooperation on Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE) between DG MARE, the UfM Secretariat and the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA) ongoing since 2016, the aim of the Action Grant (800.000 Euro) is to reinforce the technical capacity of the UfM Secretariat on Sustainable Blue Economy and maritime policy. The implementation period of the Action Grant will run for 36 months, beginning in May 2023.

In close coordination with the UfM Co-Presidency, the UfM Secretariat will support the member countries of the UfM – in particular as represented in the UfM Working Group on SBE – and relevant partners and stakeholders, in order to: (i) Ensure/structure the dialogue on SBE through regular meetings of the UfM Working Group on Blue Economy; (ii) Support the regional portfolio of actions, in particular the identification/promotion/launch of initiatives, programs, and projects in line with the 2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration on SBE and the Roadmap for its implementation; and (iii) Continue maintaining and developing the Mediterranean Blue Economy Stakeholder Platform (MedBESP) as well as engaging with the relevant Blue Economy stakeholders and partners part of the Mediterranean SBE community, and enhance the blue finance, including the BMP.

Cooperation with the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID)

In 2023 Spain contributed 0.5 Mio EUR to the UfM Hub for Jobs, Trade and Investment, through the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), specifically through a dedicated contribution to UfM Grant Scheme to Promote Employment and Entrepreneurship in the Green Economy.

AECID is also supporting the UfM Water Agenda and in 2023 the cooperation has been upgraded to new areas, including women empowerment.

As part of its funding strategy, the UfM Secretariat will continue bilateral exchanges with potential financial partners, as well as explore any innovative ways of additional funding for UfM Secretariat activities and projects.

4.2 Institutional development and Administration

i) Institutional development

Led and launched by the UfM Co-Presidency, a reflection to increase the UfMS capacity, efficiency and effectiveness started in 2023, notably through informal SOMs, retreats and ad hoc working group meetings.

In line with this reflection, the UfMS started to develop an internal institutional development framework, to be implemented as of 2024, through capacity building and development tools, including tailored trainings to improve skills and capacities of the UfMS staff and the organization. This is in line with the results based management (RBM) and reinforced monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) in the broader framework of institutional development provided for and supported by Sweden through enhanced strategic partnership with Sida.

Continued commitment and support of internal and external stakeholders as well as adequate resources will be required for the development and implementation of the institutional development plan by 2025 and beyond.

ii) Administration

With reference to structuring axis of work in internal management: i) in terms of contribution to ensure sound financial management, ii) reinforcing internal capacities and iii) providing support to operational activities, UfMS identified key topics of action, development and improvement during 2024 as follows:

- **The internal control system**

The UfMS will be working to reinforce and upgrade its 1) risk management policies, 2) segregation of duties, and 3) governance mechanisms including the establishment of an audit committee.

In this respect, the risk management as a collective and systemic endeavour should comprise not only financial and contractual aspects already controlled and mitigated under EU financial regulations and use of principle of four eyes in the financial circuits but cover operational aspects of the UfM activities.

In this context, the UfMS will continue to undertake steps towards the establishment of an internal control/internal audit function within the international recognised standards as well as study different options to establish the audit committee allowing to link the independent external audit with the governance. Similarly, UfMS will be working to launch and advance on digitalisation of Human Resources (HR) process and its documents management and official registry as an enlargement of the automation developments already conducted and in place for its financial and accounting systems.

The budgetary and the accounting systems will be complemented by the discharge procedure operationalisation to ensure the submission for approval of UfM reports and audited accounts to its governance (SOM) on annual basis. This exercise will be in implementation of the relevant statutory provisions and as culmination of the previous year's efforts yielding to the production UfMS financial statements, where all expenditure and revenues are recoded under international recognised standards: IPSAS (International Public Sector Accounting Standards) and their certification ensured by external independent audits, with unqualified opinion (positive audit results).

- **Human resource development**

Development process of HR policies will continue in 2024 placing high emphasis on the holistic approach to avoid fragmented solutions, and implementation of cultural and behavioural changes that can optimise the expertise and skills

in the UfMS to ensure on-going delivery of highly responsive, proactive and meaningful support aligned with the purpose and goals of Institution and regional cooperation in UfM region.

In this context, the UfMS will continue during 2024 working on its regulatory framework development in order to devise a revision as an evolution to previous reforms (i.e. 2012 and 2018) to ensure continuity of operations, institutional memory, enforcement of compliance and accountability principles and alignment with international organisations best practices. This work will include inter alia an update of the staff regulations.

Similarly, the UfMS will be working to enhance:

- Talent management including recruitment policies, performance management, promotion, staff management, mobility.
- Wellbeing and working conditions including ethics, inclusion policies and certified compensation professional (CCP).
- Organisational development including staffing planning, reorganisation policies, posts allocations and reallocations.
- Learning and development including coaching for managers, welcoming newcomers, learning strategy

- **Streamlining and strengthening the policies related to providing financing through grants**

Owing to the growing interest and operations with some Member States cooperation agencies in terms of grants and while the awarding and contracting including call for proposal are compliant with the EU Procurement procedures (PRAG), UfMS is to enhance its internal policies during 2024 to accompany these operations, and mitigate related risks, namely in the following aspects:

- Update the policy guidelines for financial agreements (Grants-in and Grants-out Policy Guidelines)
- Reinforce operational monitoring of related funded projects.
- Reinforce protection of financial interests in case of losses resulting from grants management

- **Streamlining and strengthening the policies related to procurement**

While UfMS public procurement procedures is using relevant EU regulations, the PRAG and compliant with EU Directive, it contemplates in 2024 to further consolidate the best practices namely in two directions:

- Further digitalise procurement process through e-procurement
- Develop exclusion from access to funding policy by developing its own framework and procedure on the basis of EU regulation to allow for an Early Detection System (EDS). The EDS is key in order to better ensure the protection of the UfM financial interests against unreliable persons and entities applying for UfMS financing funds or having concluded legal commitments with the UfMS.

The grounds for exclusion under the EDS are listed under relevant regulation and they concern:

- bankruptcy and insolvency situations
- non-payment of taxes or social security contributions
- grave professional misconduct
- fraud, corruption, participation in a criminal organisation etc.
- serious breach of contract
- irregularity
- entities created with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations (creation of shell companies).

- **Enhancing protection of personal data policies**

The UfMS will be working in 2024 to better develop protection of personal data process. While compliance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in procurements and other document is already in place, it's needed to:

- Develop consolidated policy taking into account the intergovernmental nature including EU and non-EU members, and
- Establish the data protection officer (DPO) function.

4.3 Communication and Visibility

The UfM Secretariat will focus on **communicating effectively the 2024 key initiatives, activities, and achievements of the organization**, increasing the overall understanding of the mission and role of the UfM among its key target audiences.

The initiatives **Mediterranean Capitals of Culture and Dialogue** and the fourth edition of the **Day of the Mediterranean** will constitute a communication priority. Likewise, producing and disseminating **inspiring human stories from the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation** will take an important place in the UfM communication efforts as they show the impact of projects and initiatives on people's everyday life. Furthermore, 2024 will see a **new Secretary General taking office**, which will provide another opportunity to raise awareness on the mission and work of the UfM.

Keeping informed and **fostering engagement with the UfM priority target audiences**, notably with the media, closer partners (UfM ecosystem), opinion leaders and influencers will also be part of the communication endeavours.

➤ **Media**

The UfMS will continue **identifying and targeting key journalists from the region** with the aim to increase the visibility of UfM activities and foster engagement.

The Secretariat will **implement specific initiatives**, such as the media WhatsApp group, and **organize targeted media briefings to foster engagement with a close group of journalists** following UfM areas of activity.

The UfMS **will also seek to identify partnerships with relevant media groups and organizations that can lead to impactful communication** towards UfM target audiences on the occasion of the Day of the Mediterranean, ad-hoc events, or via the organisation of debates and events with the participation of the UfM Secretary General, Deputy Secretary Generals and/or experts.

Furthermore, the Secretariat will encourage **the organisation and/or the participation in regional media events to foster dialogue and networking among/with journalists** on topics of critical interest for the region.

The press office activity will be implemented as a transversal support to communicate on the most relevant sectorial activities through the following actions: **dissemination of press releases and media advisories**; publication **of articles, op-eds, and interviews**; and the organization of **press events and trips** with relevant media outlets across the region.

Several transversal media campaigns will be implemented in 2024 to consolidate the UfM positioning as a reference organization for regional cooperation in the Mediterranean, notably on the occasion of the **UfM Regional Forum**, the **Day of the Mediterranean**, the **Mediterranean Capitals of Culture and Dialogue** initiative, important **Ministerial Meetings** and other important UfM initiatives and events specified within this work programme.

➤ **Digital communication**

UfM website

The UfM website is an essential component of the UfM's online strategy. With daily updates in three languages and a significant number of monthly visitors (21k visitors per month), it serves as **a crucial platform for disseminating UfM content and connecting with partners and stakeholders**.

The year 2024 should see the development of some key objectives such as the **increase of the subscriptions to the UfM institutional newsletter**, and **more visitors to key sections** such as the UfM publications area as well as increase the **audio-visual material in the press corner available for journalists** and media. Amongst 2024 objectives, the UfM Secretariat is planning to develop **special designs for landing pages**, essential for capturing the attention of visitors and directing them towards specific information or actions. **The website will also focus on highlighting action on the ground by showcasing the creation and publication of compelling stories.**

The UfMS recognizes the significance of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and its impact on website visibility. Implementing ongoing back-office improvements to adapt new pages to SEO is a key strategy to make the website more attractive to search engines. Considering that over one third of the total UfM website traffic comes from Google, **optimizing the website's SEO** becomes even more crucial.

In 2024, UfMS is planning to continue **enhance the mobile/responsive view of the website**. With mobile users accounting for one third of website visitors, it's crucial to ensure a seamless and optimized experience for users accessing the website from their mobile devices.

Day of the Mediterranean website

The Day of the Mediterranean website, launched in 2021 has grown into a full platform in 8 languages receiving around 30k views per year. In 2024, the website will be updated with all the elements of the campaign, aligning with the strategy for the year's celebration.

Mediterranean Capitals of Culture and Dialogue website

The dedicated webpage for the initiative of the Mediterranean Capitals of Culture and Dialogue will be developed in 2024. The site will serve as a central hub for information related to the Mediterranean Capitals and will provide details about the initiative, its objectives, participating cities, events, and other relevant information.

Emailing

Email campaigns play a vital role in the UfM's online communication strategy, serving as a means to inform partners and stakeholders about UfM activities and initiatives. With an existing general newsletter database of over 25K, the UfM aims to progressively increase this database in 2024, with a **particular focus on expanding reach among French and Arabic stakeholders**. In 2024, the UfM plans to highlight stories from the ground with positive impact across the region in their newsletters.

Emailing will be also used to enhance the relationship between the UfM Secretariat with the Co-Presidency and member states: in 2024, a bi-monthly newsletter of the Secretary General and calendar of UfMS activities will continue to be shared with the SOM. Other tools can be explored to improve this communication channel.

Social Media

The UfM social media platforms gather over 500K followers on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram. In 2024, the UfM will seek to **foster engagement with UfM target audiences' accounts, the primary objective being to encourage active participation**. The UfM will continue to **foster geographical balance** to ensure a broader reach and engagement on all UfM countries. As a general goal, **the UfM will seek to increase its followers base** by implementing strategies such as targeted advertising campaigns, cross-promotion with relevant organizations or influencers. In this sense, the **collaborating with selected digital content creators who align with the UfM's mission can help expand the reach and impact of social media campaigns**.

➤ **Public affairs**

Efforts to **identify and update key contacts within the main UfM target audiences** will continue throughout 2024 with a view to keeping the UfM ecosystem up to date on the organisation's news.

In 2024, the Secretariat will implement outreach actions in line with the UfM calendar of activities and the overall calendar of regional events and initiatives. This will allow to build synergies with other partners and increase the awareness and visibility of the Secretariat's activities:

- **9th UfM Regional Forum**
- **Day of the Mediterranean 2024:** the UfM Secretariat will keep building awareness around the fourth edition of the celebrations, while looking for **synergies and collaborations with partner organisations**. In particular, the Communication Unit will seek to build partnerships ahead of the international day and the **Mediterranean Capitals of Culture and Dialogue**. This joint initiative pushed by the UfM Secretariat and the Anna Lindh Foundation will provide additional opportunities for both organisations to engage and collaborate, while the ongoing collaboration with the **Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM)** will continue through their 2024 ARLEM Awards, which are now framed under the Day of the Mediterranean since 2022.
- **Engaging with academia and regional initiatives:** To reinforce the UfM position as expert in Mediterranean current affairs, the UfM Secretariat will continue to organise **joint debates and briefings**, notably with experts from renowned think tanks and academic institutions, tackling key topics of interest in the region. Furthermore, the Secretariat will strive to organise more **one-to-one or group meetings with academia representatives** (coming mainly from think tanks and universities) with UfM representatives.
- In view of **renewed strategic communications actions**, the COMMs Unit will explore carrying out audiences' studies and set objectives and key messages in line with the UfM renewed priorities.
- Likewise, **new and innovative events formats** ensuring more engagement and networking opportunities will also be explored, in order to reinforce the UfM's relations with its audiences and stakeholders.

Finally, the UfM Secretariat will also keep ensuring that the UfM key audiences are fully informed and engaged in the UfM mission by organising informative activities such as **visits of groups of target audiences including parliamentarians, students from renowned Universities and representatives of institutions from the UfM ecosystem**.

➤ **Communication tools and publications**

UfM institutional and sectorial publications and info tools (Annual report, brochure, press kit, newsletters, Power Points, leaflets, reports, videos, etc.) are valuable tools to present the UfM Secretariat activities to external stakeholders. UfM publications will continue to be **regularly updated in 2024** to reflect the newest endeavours of the UfM Secretariat.

The UfM Secretariat will also continue to create **audio-visual material on UfM projects and initiatives**, as short videos are a great way to share key messages in an entertaining way for the viewers. The Communication Unit will conduct in 2024 more **field trips to meet with the people behind each project, interview beneficiaries and record images of the projects' day-to-day**, with the aim to showcase the positive impact on the ground of UfM endeavours. Aiming to build an emotional connection with the UfM wider audience, the Communication Unit will keep focusing on the **creation of Human Stories** whose protagonists come from UfM-labelled projects and other supported initiatives, but also partners, collaborators, or institutional stakeholders, creating compelling narratives to illustrate the tangible contribution of a strengthened regional cooperation and its positive impact on peoples' lives.

