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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thank you very much for walking this talk with us for so many years.
The UfM at a glance

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

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

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

What is the Barcelona Process?
The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, known as the Barcelona Process, is a dialogue framework born out of a commitment to strengthen relations between Europe and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries, with the overall objective of establishing a Mediterranean area of peace, stability and shared prosperity. The Barcelona Process was focused around three main baskets: Political & Security; Economic & Financial; Social, Cultural & Human.

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

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

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

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

UfM Roadmap for Action:

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

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

**Sustainable Development**
- 47% of the labelled projects

**Climate Action**
- 60+ labelled projects

**Economic Development & Employment**
- 53% of the labelled projects

**Environmental & Blue Economy**

**Higher Education & Research**

**Social & Civil Affairs**

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE ACTION
SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
CIVIL PROTECTION

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

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

*Syria suspended its membership in December 2011
| Libya has an observer status
Momentum for change: The UfM reform process

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

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

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

The 8th UfM Regional Forum: A privileged platform for political dialogue across the Mediterranean

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

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

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

• UfM Member States expressed grave concern over the humanitarian situation in Gaza.
• They stressed the need and obligation to protect civilians and to respect international humanitarian law by all and at all times and condemned indiscriminate killing and targeting of civilians.
• They stress their rejection of any displacement of Palestinians from Gaza or the West Bank, as well as the internal displacement of Palestinians inside Gaza.
• They reaffirmed the collective responsibility to achieve a just, lasting, and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue on the basis of the two-state solution.
• They emphasised commitment to working together to realise the two-state solution as the only viable path to solving the Palestine-Israeli conflict and to ensure freedom and dignity for Palestinians, sustainable security for Israelis, and lasting peace and stability for the entire region.

• They called for implementing the two-state solution, with clear time-lines and agreed implementation mechanisms, with two sovereign and secure states, Palestine and Israel, living side-by-side in peace and mutual recognition on the basis of the 4 June 1967 lines.

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

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

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

Nasser Kamel
UfM Secretary General
15 years: building bridges to grow together

A legacy of partnership and a vision for the future

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

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

Concrete results, tangible impact

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

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

**Employment**

UfM Grant Schemes for employment promotion

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

**Gender Equality**

Promoting women empowerment for industrial development in the MENA region

The project benefited 2,000 female entrepreneurs involved in training, counselling and capacity-building sessions.

**Climate**

First scientific report on climate and environmental change in the Mediterranean

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

**Environment**

Plastic Busters, for a Mediterranean free from litter

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

**Education**

Mediterranean New Chance network

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

**Urban Development**

The UfM Urban Agenda and Housing Plan

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

How is the initiative shaped?

2 cities 1 North

1 South

1 year

The strength of unity

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

Based on the call of Ministers of Culture of the Euro-Mediterranean region on 17 June 2022 in Naples (Italy), as well as the recommendation of more than 200 young representatives from civil society of over 20 countries at the Forum des Mondes Méditerranéens in Marseille (France), this initiative was built to further promote the diversity and shared identity of the Euro-Mediterranean region and contribute to a better mutual understanding of its peoples.

A shared Mediterranean identity

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

From street names honouring an important figure from the region, colourful mosaics of long-forgotten civilizations or food specialties inspired by human movements throughout History, small pieces of the Mediterranean can be found where nobody expects them to!

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

The 2 awarded cities are

- Alexandria (Egypt) and Tirana (Albania)

How is the initiative shaped?

2 cities 1 North

1 South

1 year

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

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

The Blue Mediterranean Partnership steps up support for a sustainable blue economy. In 2023, a unique coalition of international financial institutions and donors joined hands with the UfM at COP27 to step up their contribution to the Blue Mediterranean Partnership and tackle the threats our Sea faces by coordinating the financing of blue economy projects through a new multi-donor fund, focusing initially on Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco.

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

The Mediterranean Sea is a world’s biodiversity hotspot. It harbours around 11% of all marine species in less than 1% of the global marine area, with around 20% of those species being endemic.

Meet the World Ocean Council

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

The WOC engages with and brings together leaders from various ocean industries, including shipping, oil and gas, fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, renewable energy (wind, wave, tidal), ports, dredging, cables, as well as the maritime legal, financial and insurance communities, and others to collaborate towards the responsible use of the seas. The Council ensures that the ocean business community’s role in ocean sustainable development is understood by all relevant stakeholders.

Their network currently includes more than 35,000 ocean industry and media stakeholders around the world.
promote cooperation, engagement, and corporate responsibility from business and investment communities involved in the maritime and marine sectors and conducting activities at the Mediterranean level.

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

First concrete steps of the Plan of Action for a Model Mediterranean Sea (PAMEX) by 2030 PAMEX is a political blueprint that seeks to accelerate action for nature and climate in the Mediterranean. It operates as a voluntary platform, aiming to foster increased coordination and partnerships among countries and regional organisations, and to raise the profile of the region as a role model, leading the transition towards an equitable, carbon neutral and nature positive world.

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

- Raising the ambition for the protection of marine biodiversity in the Mediterranean;
- Promoting and developing sustainable fishing, to end overfishing by 2030;
- Redoubling efforts to combat marine pollution, so that no plastic is discharged into the Mediterranean by 2030;
- Promoting maritime transport practices that protect the marine environment and combat climate change.

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

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

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

The launch of the $1 billion USD PAMEX 2030 Local Finance Investment Facility (PLIFF) took place in the Mediterranean Pavilion, coordinated by the UfM, during the COP27 in Sharm–el–Sheikh!
Linking local blue economy ecosystems to regional advancements:

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

In this context, the UfM Secretariat took part in Barcelona REACT 2023 Economic Reactivation Days, organised by the Barcelona City Council, with the goal of linking and sharing best practices and experiences between leading local blue economy ecosystems and the regional dimension. The UfM considers it essential to boost the sectors and activities of the Mediterranean sustainable blue economy community, as well as to bring stakeholders together to achieve better convergence and coordination of efforts.

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

Monaco Blue Initiative:

Identifying the multidimensional challenges to the Mediterranean Sea:

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

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

Land abandonment:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Moving towards integrated management of forests in Tunisia:

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

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

In line with its strategic objectives to protect the environment and biodiversity, the UfM Secretariat co-organised in March 2023 a regional capacity building workshop for Mediterranean countries on the restoration of degraded forest landscapes. Held in collaboration with the FAO and the General Directorate of Forests of Tunisia, the workshop shared knowledge related to the restoration of degraded Mediterranean forest landscapes, with a focus on the assessment and planning of restoration. In particular, it examined the role of Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR) as a low-cost opportunity.
to conserve biodiversity and improve ecosystem services, including carbon sequestration and watershed protection. Overall, the workshop gave participants a better understanding of the context of Mediterranean forest and landscape restoration, while providing an opportunity to enhance regional dynamics and knowledge sharing.

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

Check out our video for more information on the project:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When a craft is born in Syria and flourishes in Jordan

The Smart DESERT project was launched to empower vulnerable Jordanians, and Syrian refugees through agricultural development.
Non-conventional water resources refer to alternative sources of water beyond traditional freshwater reservoirs, such as rivers and lakes. These resources typically include treated wastewater, desalinated seawater, harvested rainwater, reclaimed water from industrial processes, and brackish groundwater. Non-conventional water resources are becoming increasingly important in water-stressed regions where conventional sources are insufficient to meet growing demand.

The interconnectedness of water, energy, food, and ecosystems

Environmental supply and demand by 2050

Preventing droughts and floods

Water law and conflict resolution

Financing sustainable water solutions

Innovations in water use

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

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

The 5th Mediterranean Water Forum kick-off meeting fostered a spirit of collaboration. Experts, stakeholders, and policymakers came together with a shared goal: finding sustainable solutions to the Mediterranean’s water challenges. This spirit of cooperation will continue as participants further develop concepts for the different themes to be addressed at the upcoming forum.

Preserving our shared water: the 5th Mediterranean Water Forum kick-off meeting

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

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

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

Direct beneficiaries:
- No. of families benefiting by the project: Jordan 5 / Palestine 6
- No. of farmers engaged in the project: Jordan 8 / Palestine 17
- No. of female farmers engaged in the project: Jordan 2 / Palestine 2
- No. decision-makers, managers involved in the project: Jordan 8 / Palestine 6

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

Location
Jordan, Palestine

Duration
From 1 September 2020 to 30 June 2023

Total cost
€1,582,493
Fully funded by Sida
Guaranteeing food security, resilience, and sustainability

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

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

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

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

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

To learn more

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

You can find it here:

To build on this momentum, FAO, with the support of the Italian government, announced the launch of an observatory dedicated to sharing knowledge, experience, tools and materials related to the Mediterranean diet.

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

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

Advocating for food security through global partnerships

As a global issue, food security is also present in the agendas of many international organisations. Therefore, the UfM Secretariat takes part in events, conferences and roundtables organised by the international community to draw attention to the Euro-Mediterranean region. In July 2023, in Rome, the UN Food Systems Summit +2 Stocktaking Moment took place at the FAO premises, in collaboration with other UN Agencies, the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub and the wider UN system. This conference was an opportunity to review progress on the commitments to action regarding the 2021 Food Systems Summit, establish future priorities and advocate for urgent action.

In this framework, the UfM Secretariat and PRIMA supported the organisation of a session on “Healthy Diets, Cultures and Tradition: Lessons from the Mediterranean Diet.” The session aimed at valorising the features that define the Mediterranean diet: local food policies, collaboration of business actors around the principles of circular economy, engagement of the academic community to investigate health and environmental impacts. These principles demonstrate how something as mundane as the Mediterranean diet can also trigger a cultural, social, and economic regeneration with food at its core. Consequently, this session positioned the Mediterranean diet as a good practice for preserving traditional diets and lifestyles while promoting the enhancement of local agricultural industries.

To build on this momentum, FAO, with the support of the Italian government, announced the launch of an observatory dedicated to sharing knowledge, experience, tools and materials related to the Mediterranean diet.
The impacts of climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and recent conflicts pose a particular threat to rural and agricultural communities, who are already affected by development challenges, environmental degradation, drought and gradual land abandonment. Their food supply systems are undermined as a result, threatening their livelihoods, and increasing the risk of poverty and vulnerability.

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

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

Fostering resilience: Uniting Mediterranean shores through research and innovation

Food security is challenged by conflicts, climate change and economic instability. The development of resilience policies, either in the food, economic or any other sector, needs to be accompanied by research and innovation initiatives that promote cooperation between the two shores of the Mediterranean. The UfM is determined to make use of regional dialogue events and platforms to underscore the importance of scientific and academic communities. A clear example in January 2023 was the high-level mission to Egypt on agriculture, agri-food, and food security, led by the Italian government, where the UfM Secretariat represented the international organisations part of the Mediterranean Ministerial Dialogue on the Food Crisis, held in 2022.

The high-level mission aimed at discussing the scientific and cultural partnerships between Italy and Egypt, with a particular focus on the existing PRIMA initiative and its innovative agri-food economic projects. Additionally, the UfM Secretariat used this opportunity to highlight the importance of public-private partnerships to support culture, agri-food, and food security, led by the Italian government, where the UfM Secretariat represented the international organisations part of the Mediterranean Ministerial Dialogue on the Food Crisis, held in 2022.

The high-level mission aimed at discussing the scientific and cultural partnerships between Italy and Egypt, with a particular focus on the existing PRIMA initiative and its innovative agri-food economic projects. Additionally, the UfM Secretariat used this opportunity to highlight the importance of public-private partnerships to support innovation and sustainability in the Mediterranean. Research projects such as the existing PRIMA projects can contribute to job creation, better and more sustainable productivity and to the digitalisation of the agricultural sector.

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

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

Agri-food products made by the beneficiaries of the FLOWER Project, which benefitted from the 1st UfM Grant Scheme to promote employment and sustainable practices.
1. Research infrastructures: that can bring scientists together across borders, ensuring North-South collaboration, while benefiting local communities.

2. Mobility and training: which should lead to the building of communities of practice.

3. Science’s role in foreign policy: with increased channels of exchange between diplomats and researchers.

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

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

Meet PRIMA

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

Learn more about PRIMA and its projects:

加速地中海环境和气候的转变

加速地中海环境和气候的转变

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

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Environmental and climate action

What is it?

The 2030 GreenerMed Agenda

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

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

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

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

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

These challenges will require a new approach to finance mechanisms, public policies, and resources for entrepreneurship, but most of all will require continued and reinforced efforts to link education with innovation, the dual needs of jobs markets and sustainability.

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

EU Green Week 2023: Making the green transition gender inclusive
EU Green Week is an annual opportunity to raise awareness and discuss environmental policy in the region. As part of EU Green Week 2023, the UfM co-hosted an online session in June titled “Women as key players in greening Mediterranean food systems: drivers and challenges” alongside FAO, CIHEAM and PRIMA. The webinar provided 200 online attendees, comprising a diverse group of public and private sector representatives, with a platform to discuss how to tackle gender gaps in the sector and empower women to build resilient and inclusive food systems.

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

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

Dr Fatima Zahra Beraich
Founder of Biodôme
Inclusive green economy

The European Environment Agency (EEA) defines a green economy as one in which resources are used efficiently and natural systems are maintained thanks to environmental, economic, and social policies and innovations. Inclusive green economies enable people to improve their living environments and have decent jobs while allowing businesses to increase profits through more environmentally-conscious practices.

Making the Mediterranean more resilient to climate change

In a region where the average temperature rise already surpasses the 1.5°C threshold set in the Paris Agreement and where, with current policies, they are expected to increase by 2.2°C compared to pre-industrial levels by 2040, taking concrete action against climate change is crucial. The UfM participated in a range of activities to this effect, from joining the Local2030 Islands Network to joining MedCOP, the annual gathering of Mediterranean stakeholders for climate action, or stepping up support for the Blue Mediterranean Partnership (see pg. 10-11 for more information) at COP28, where it continued to lead the Mediterranean Coalition.

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

The Mediterranean Coalition

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

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

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

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

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

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

The UfM made important progress with the implementation of the 2021 Ministerial Declaration on Energy and the 2022 Roadmap for Action on Energy. Key accomplishments in 2023 include promoting sustainable recovery, establishing integrated energy and climate models, developing guidelines and targets for energy efficiency, and enhancing the business environment and investment climate. These were achieved through events such as the annual meeting of the UfM Energy Platforms in May, where regional stakeholders explored collaborative initiatives and discussions continued around the proposal for a Mediterranean grid code to enhance cooperation. Another key gathering in this context was the interim review meeting in November, where participants highlighted the need to improve investment in sustainable energy sources and foster public-private partnerships.

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

The 3rd UfM Energy and Climate Business Forum was a milestone in the promotion of the private sector’s role in the energy transition. This strategic event served as a regional platform for the promotion of new business models and encouraging the business environment and investment climate.

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

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

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

Projects also had to showcase their overall contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). After reviewing around 80 submitted proposals from 12 UfM countries and from 37 different universities, three prizes were awarded, as well as the two winning mentions.
According to recent studies, cities can avoid up to 20% of premature deaths with better urban and transport planning.

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

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

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

Reiterated political support for sustainable urban development in the Mediterranean area

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

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

In particular, they mandated the UfM to identify strategies to:
- improve urban health by promoting better planning, providing local communities with social spaces and services, supporting climate action, and ensuring the sustainability of natural resources, and nature-based solutions;
- encourage joint work in sustainable port city transformation and port-city cooperation;
- promote public policies and programmes to tackle affordable housing;
- promote the valorisation and dissemination of vernacular architecture and traditional building skills, methodologies and materials as a means to increase cultural embeddedness and climate adaptation solutions;
- increase the safety of citizens and the resilience of cities in the face of natural and man-made disasters;
- reflect on coastal land planning governance models and instruments.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sudden crises, conflicts and large-scale shocks can affect production processes and businesses. This context, the economic and regional integration of the Euro-Mediterranean region holds untapped potential to combat global economic challenges. The UfM is committed to contributing to the integration of our region through its policy frameworks, dialogue platforms and projects.

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

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

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

Building connectivity for enhanced regional integration

Transport is a vital pillar of sustainable development, present in eight out of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Transport is also a driver of economic development and an important component of regional integration in the Mediterranean. Consequently, in February 2023, the UfM hosted online the 2nd UfM Ministerial Conference on Transport. Ministers from the Member States reaffirmed their continued collective political support to developing a safe, secure, sustainable, efficient, and connected transport system. Participants also reiterated the importance of creating an integrated multi-modal trans-Mediterranean transport network and the need to improve connectivity among Southern Mediterranean countries, between these countries and the EU and towards inner Africa and Asia.

Ministers recognised the work that has been carried out and acknowledged the progress achieved in fulfilling the cooperation objectives defined at the previous Ministerial Conference held in 2013. There is a pressing need to ensure the resilience of sustainable transport systems to climate change, which will only be achieved by mobilising available funds in a coordinated manner. Participants concluded by elaborating a Joint Declaration which comprises recommendations for greater regional transport cooperation in the following areas:

1. Maritime transport;
2. Land transport;
3. Air transport;

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

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

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

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

The RTAP was elaborated after programmes and ministerial declarations are crucial to set the objectives.

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

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

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

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

Discover the RTAP and its 28 tangible actions here:
There is wide variation in the practice of governing the source of imports. This importance is derived from the fact that duties and taxes are determined by the national source of a product. Their importance is further increased by the need to ensure that duties and taxes are applied in a fair and consistent manner. Rules of origin are the criteria needed to determine the national source of a product. They are used to identify the country of origin of a product, which can then be used to determine the applicable duties and taxes.

**Rules of Origin (RoO)**

Rules of origin are the criteria needed to determine the national source of a product. Their importance is derived from the fact that duties and taxes are determined by the national source of a product. Rules of origin are a critical aspect of international trade. Consequently, and due to their complexities and nuances, practical sessions and workshops are crucial for all actors involved. The UfM is committed to bridging the gaps between the public and the private sector, and will continue launching initiatives and workshops to simplify complex international trade processes.

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

**What is it?**

Fostering peer-learning through north-south engagement

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

The participants in these study visits immersed themselves in the country’s entrepreneurial ecosystem, learn, share best practices and network.

The main aim of regional platforms is to foster a close interaction between national experts and stakeholders, allowing them to exchange on ministerial mandates, better understand needs, share experience, identify best practices, and promote concrete coo-
Skills development for the Mediterranean’s economic growth and inclusion

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

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

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

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

What is it?

Team Europe Initiatives

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

This High-Level Meeting connected several UfM Ministers and Secretaries of State from both shores of the Mediterranean with cooperation actors and young entrepreneurs, who could share their experience and insights on the skill-related opportunities and challenges that persist in our region. The UfM reaffirmed its commitment to acting as a bridge between states, peoples, and sectors, including in the employment spheres. The meeting took place back-to-back with the 4th UfM Community of Practice on Youth Employment in the Southern Mediterranean, which took place in Madrid on the same dates.

Building a bridge between Mediterranean youth and the labour market

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

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

The UfM Secretariat also partnered with the German Development Cooperation to host the UfM Conference on Youth Employment and the Future of Work. The conference, held in Tirana in June 2023, further exemplifies...
Check out the Future of Sustainable and Inclusive Economic and Human Development recap:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Representatives from employers’ and workers’ organisations from UfM countries, social partner organisations, and representatives from the UfM and the EU participated in sessions that tackled:

1. practice of social dialogue,
2. the green and digital transitions, 3. active inclusion and effective social protection, 4. economic migration and brain drain and 5. regional programming.

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

Current data highlights that, compared to the global average, Europe and the MENA region are below the 6.2% global percentage of women entrepreneurs who own a business (5.3% and 4.5% respectively). This low rate is explained by the difficulties in accessing business support services and networks. In light of this reality, the UfM has put at the heart of its priorities women economic empowerment in 2023.

Enhancing the pivotal role of women entrepreneurs in Industry 4.0

Industry 4.0 technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Blockchain, and the Internet of Things (IoT) are unleashing a new era of economic disruption. Although they have the potential to promote sustainable growth, insufficient digital access, skills, and finance are still significant hurdles for women entrepreneurs.
The UfM and the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) joined forces to host the 7th Women Business Forum, which focused on the role of women in industry and innovation. Taking place in Tunis over two days in October, the annual event provided participants with a unique opportunity to learn from and exchange knowledge with leading private sector professionals as well as high-level public officials.

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

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

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

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

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

Online attendees agreed that the main challenges they face include knowledge gaps, a lack of mentorship opportunities, and unhealthy work-life balances, in addition to gender biases, limited financial literacy, and restricted access to funding.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tapping into the potential of women in the water sector in the Mediterranean
The role of women in the water sector is paramount and should be ensured across the Euro-Mediterranean region. The UfM marked International
A minimum viable product (MVP) aims at validating assumptions and hypotheses about the product’s value proposition, market fit, and feasibility while minimizing resources and time invested.

Discover GWP-Med study here

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

The UfM, together with a multi-stakeholder coalition including Member State, UN agencies, international and regional organisations, NGOs, private sector bodies and civil society, joined UNESCO’s World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP) Call for Action (CfA) in 2021 to accelerate gender equality in the water domain. Two years later, it helped co-organise the “Supporting gender equality in the Water Action Agenda with Global Multi-stakeholder coalitions”, while narrowing the gender gap between policy and practice, prioritising the collection of sex-disaggregated data, and counter-fighting norms and stereotypes that disadvantage women and girls.

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

Integrating gender equality approaches in Higher Education

The UfM Secretariat organised a workshop on Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) in Higher Education institutions and STEM in December 2023. Over 100 people took part in the session, including representatives from the UfM’s Jordanian Co-presidency, the EU Commission, and academics from France, Spain, Greece, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and Tunisia, as well as entrepreneurs with a background in engineering, AI, and robotics.

Speakers shared their views on the challenges and opportunities associated with developing, implementing, and monitoring GEPs in the sector. Sessions focused on the importance of GEPs in universities, emphasising their pivotal role in securing funding and fostering inclusivity in academia. They also facilitated dialogue on developing effective GEPs and tailoring them to the Mediterranean context. Although GEPs can help empower women in academic environments by promoting equal access to education, leadership opportunities, research funding, and career progression, obstacles persist, and attendees emphasised the need to develop a gender-sensitive approach to early education.

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

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

Youth empowerment for a sustainable and inclusive Mediterranean

Approximately a third of Euro-Mediterranean citizens are under the age of 24, a population that faces obstacles ranging from environmental crises to high unemployment rates, gender inequality, and insufficient political representation. However, when empowered to actively contribute as citizens, young people have the potential to find solutions to current and future challenges. Therefore, empowering the region’s youth as catalysts for positive change remains a UfM top priority, as evidenced in initiatives such as the UfM Youth Strategy 2030, adopted in 2021.

In November 2023, the UfM Secretariat hosted the third edition of the Mediterranean Youth Academy (MYA), back-to-back with the UfM annual event on Youth, held this time under the thematic “Youth Engagement for a Sustainable and Inclusive Mediterranean”. This initiative was organised in collaboration with the Mediterranean Youth Academy, the Anna Lindh Foundation, the European Institute of the Mediterranean (EIMed), Casa Mediterraneo and sponsored by the German Development Cooperation. More than 90 young people from over 15 Euro-Mediterranean countries participated in panels and non-formal education workshops focused on three main priority areas:

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

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

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

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

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

**Priority area 1**
Environment and climate action; digital and green revolutions can allow young people to become actors of change.

**Priority area 2**
Education and employment; investing in young talent and their initiatives contributes to inclusive and sustainable growth.

**Priority area 3**
Social inclusion and participation; current global challenges require a cross-sectorial and inter-generational approach.

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

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

One of the main priorities within the UfM Youth Agenda is the education and training of young people. Poor quality education, high dropout rates, skill mismatches with the labour market and inequalities when accessing higher education have been identified as the main challenges that hinder youth employment and development. Consequently, the UfM Secretariat partners regularly with other institutions to contribute to youth education and empowerment. Throughout 2023, collaboration with the European Investment Bank (EIB) has made it possible to provide training in Moroccan, Egyptian and Jordanian universities. This initiative was a continuation of the pilot sessions hosted in November 2022 in the Euro-Mediterranean University of Fez, a flagship UfM-labelled project.

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

Towards inclusive policies, UfM’s initiatives for disability rights in the region

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

The UfM is determined to increase its scope of action in this area, where extending the network of involvement and collaboration is fundamental. After signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the League of Arab States in 2022, the UfM’s Secretary General attended a high-level event “The Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Multidimensional Poverty”, organised in January 2023 by the Arab League at the initiative of the Ministry of Social Development and Family of the State of Qatar. These initial meetings are part of the UfM Secretariat’s goal to pave the way and contribute to the agenda of the second edition of the EuroMed Conference on Disability in January 2024. Additionally, the UfM Secretariat’s ongoing collaboration with the Arab League and the ONCE Foundation has made it possible to carry out the “First situational assessment of the social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities in the Euro-Mediterranean region”, published in October 2023.

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

The 2nd Euro-Mediterranean Conference on the Socioeconomic Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities presents an exceptional opportunity to discuss, among diverse stakeholders, the launch of a Euro-Mediterranean Agenda by the end of 2024. Through regional dialogue and cooperation, the UfM Secretariat aims at generating the necessary knowledge and interest to foster more inclusive and comprehensive policies.

Khadija Jallouli: Revolutionising Mobility for All

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

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

Learning, building capacities...

Digital transformation

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

Since the adoption of its 2017 Roadmap for Action, the UfM has been actively engaged in promoting digital connectivity, skills, and innovation. In the spirit of fostering collaboration, building bridges, and learning from each other across the Mediterranean region, the UfM Secretariat sought the support of a digital transformation champion among its members: Estonia. In 2019, the 1st UfM Conference on Digital Transformation and Digital Skills for the Future took place in Tallinn, setting the scene for all UfM activities in this sector.

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

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

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

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

Held in Tangiers, Morocco, the event gave participants the chance to exchange insights and best practices on current opportunities and challenges to unleashing the full potential of digitalisation in the region. Representatives from Albania, Bosnia, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, Morocco, and Spain shared their experience.

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

The UfM has subsequently organised several technical training sessions on digitalisation and e-governance in the Southern Mediterranean to promote these fields.
Walking the talk: implementing the conferences’ results across the region

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

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

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

Harnessing the power of digitalisation

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

With that in mind, the UfM Secretariat co-organised two activities in Turin, a workshop on the platform economy together with the German Development Cooperation and the European Training Foundation, as well as the 6th Meeting of the UfM Community of Practice on Youth Employment in the Southern Mediterranean, both focused on digitalisation.

Impact rating

Impact rating is a rating tool making it possible to engage companies in achieving more positive impacts for their territories. Created and developed by ANIMA, IMPACT RATING targets all organisations that support companies and wish to encourage them to develop their social responsibility and increase their contribution to sustainable development. It assesses the performance and impact of a company or an investment project in economic, social, environmental, and territorial terms, based on a questionnaire on the company’s practices. The tool is aligned with international initiatives and makes it possible to assess a company’s contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals – SDGs.

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

The seminar yielded positive outcomes, highlighting regulations that encourage businesses to engage in sustainable development, both at the European level and in the countries of the Southern Mediterranean. The strategies implemented by the private sector and public organisations in this field were shared, along with a commitment to define a Euro-Mediterranean joint strategy. The commitments made by countries since the Paris Agreement on climate change and emerging international standards in social responsibility have prompted business and investment organisations to adopt tools for monitoring the impact of investment projects.
The Mediterranean region has unique water management challenges, which are mainly due to its geographical, climate, and socio-economic diversity. More than 180 million people experience water poverty in the Mediterranean, while an additional 60 million face water stress to a certain degree.

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

In this line, the UfM Secretariat organised, in 2023, the 1st Conference on Digital Transformation of the Water Sector in the Mediterranean. It served as a valuable platform for stakeholders to exchange knowledge, share experiences, and explore innovative solutions for water institutions and utility service providers in the region. This conference also paved the way towards a Roadmap for Digitalisation of the Water Sector in the Euro-Mediterranean Region, as UfM Member States deem it essential to formulate effective strategies to achieve Sustainable Development Goals and address pressing water-related issues in the region.

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

Globally, women hold only 2 in every 10 science, engineering and information and communication technology jobs. Narrowing the gender gap in digital skills could help narrow the gender wage gap by providing access for women to higher skilled ICT-related roles. Want to learn more about this crucial topic?

In line with the theme chosen for UN International Women’s Day on 8 March 2023, "DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality", the UfM held a webinar on Innovation and Technological Change for Gender Equality: Cracking the Code to Equity. Successful women entrepreneurs working in the field of digital platforms, AI, and tech in the MENA region (Algeria, Egypt, and Tunisia), together with institutional representatives, shared good practices and discussed solutions for an inclusive digital ecosystem.

In particular, panellists shared their experience and recommendations with almost 100 online attendees on how to ensure that no one is left behind; on how to create a gender-transformative innovation ecosystem; and on how to ensure that technology and innovation are inclusive, accessible, and respond to the needs of women and girls.

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

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

In this line, 2 in every 10 science, engineering and information and communication technology jobs are held by women. Want to learn more about this crucial topic?
In the Mediterranean region, characterised by heightened vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, robust civil protection measures are imperative. The UfM champions initiatives aimed at bolstering resilience, enhancing capacity, and fostering cooperation to fortify civil protection in the region. Through collaborative efforts, we endeavour to mitigate risks, safeguard livelihoods, and foster protection and preparedness.

Collaboration as a key tool to protect our region

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

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

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

**The PPRD-Med Programme**

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**Building a Mediterranean Civil Protection Framework**

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

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

**Rethinking the role of communication in emergency situations**

Following its contribution to the UN European and Central Asia Office of Disaster Risk Reduction (EFDRR) Conference in Athens in 2022, the following year the UfM Secretariat joined the Romanian Department for Emergency Situations and the EFDRR, along with the European Civil Protection Directors-General to discuss experience and approaches towards building societal resilience through effective risk communication. Also discussed was the development of recommendations for governments and stakeholders to make risk communication more effective.

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

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

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

It was also deemed necessary to rely on civil society networks and actors. Youth was also mentioned as a key factor both currently and in the future. It was noted that training and education initiatives on the use and understanding of social media are in place in several countries. It was also noted that risk awareness, i.e. informing citizens in advance of the risks they may be exposed to, is crucial so that citizens know how to react and can be an ally of the emergency services.
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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
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<td>AECID</td>
<td>Spanish Agency for Cooperation</td>
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<td>AFD</td>
<td>Agence Française de Développement (French Development Agency)</td>
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<td>AI</td>
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<td>CEPEs</td>
<td>Confederación Empresarial Española de Economía Social (Spanish Confederation of Social Economy Entrepreneurs)</td>
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<td>CfA</td>
<td>Call for action</td>
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<td>International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies</td>
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<td>CMI-UNOPe</td>
<td>Centre for Mediterranean Integration–United Nations Office for Project Services</td>
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<td>CIPR</td>
<td>Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change</td>
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<td>CPMR</td>
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<td>CRPD</td>
<td>Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</td>
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<td>DG EAC</td>
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<td>Directorate General of European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations of the European Commission</td>
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<td>DG EMPL</td>
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<td>EEA</td>
<td>European Environment Agency</td>
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<td>EPDR</td>
<td>Europe and Central Asia Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
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<td>Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
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<td>KfW</td>
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<td>LUMI</td>
<td>Large Unified Modern Infrastructure</td>
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<td>MBi</td>
<td>Monaco Blue Initiative</td>
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<td>MedCOP</td>
<td>an annual meeting of Mediterranean stakeholders for climate action</td>
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<td>MedJNC</td>
<td>Mediterranean Network of Second Chance Schools</td>
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<td>MENA</td>
<td>Middle East and North Africa</td>
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<td>MSMEs</td>
<td>Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises</td>
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<td>MVP</td>
<td>Minimum viable product</td>
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<td>NCWR</td>
<td>Non-conventional water resources</td>
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<td>NEEET</td>
<td>Not in education, employment, or training</td>
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<td>OGR</td>
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<td>Plan of Action for a Model Mediterranean Sea</td>
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<td>PLIFI</td>
<td>PAMEx Local Investment Finance Facility</td>
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<td>PPBD</td>
<td>Prevention, Preparedness and Response to natural and man-made Disasters’</td>
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<td>PRIMA</td>
<td>Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area</td>
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<td>Promoting Women’s Empowerment</td>
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<td>Sustainable Food Systems in the Mediterranean</td>
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<td>Sida</td>
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<td>SME</td>
<td>Small and medium-sized enterprise</td>
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<td>Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics</td>
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<td>TEI</td>
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<td>UfM</td>
<td>Union for the Mediterranean</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN CRPD</td>
<td>United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNEP MAP</td>
<td>United Nations Environment Programme Mediterranean Action Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNEP</td>
<td>United Nations Environment Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<td>UNIDO</td>
<td>United Nations Industrial Development Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNIMED</td>
<td>Mediterranean Universities Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>WBF</td>
<td>Women Business Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>WEF</td>
<td>Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems</td>
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<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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<td>WOC</td>
<td>World Ocean Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>WWAP</td>
<td>World Water Assessment Programme</td>
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</table>
The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) is an intergovernmental Euro-Mediterranean organisation which brings together all countries of the European Union and 16 countries of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean. The UfM’s mission is to enhance regional cooperation, dialogue and the implementation of projects and initiatives with tangible impacts on our citizens, with an emphasis on young people and women, in order to address the three strategic objectives of the region: stability, human development and integration.