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Agencia Española
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para el Desarrollo

EMPOWERING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN THE MENA AGRO-FOOD SECTOR THROUGH SOCIAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION

21-22 OCTOBER 2025
CAIRO (EGYPT)

Joint Draft Declaration: CIHEAM–UfM Commitment to a Regional Agenda on Innovation for Women Entrepreneurs in the Agro-Food Value Chain in the Euro-Mediterranean Region

1. Rationale and Vision

The Euro-Mediterranean region faces converging challenges: climate change, resource scarcity, food insecurity, and persistent gender inequalities. Women, particularly in rural areas, play a central role in food systems, yet their contributions often remain undervalued and underrepresented in innovation ecosystems.

Building on the outcomes of the Zaragoza Symposium (June 2025), the CIHEAM and the UfM recognise that empowering women as innovators and entrepreneurs is essential for achieving inclusive growth, sustainable food systems, and regional stability.

Gender equality is not only a moral and social imperative — it is a driver of economic resilience, environmental stewardship, and innovation.

2. Strategic Objective

The overarching goal of this initiative is to promote women's leadership and participation in agri-food innovation and entrepreneurship by creating enabling environments, strengthening capacities, and improving access to finance, knowledge, and markets.

This will be achieved through a Regional Task Force and a Joint Plan of Action (2026–2030), aligning national and regional initiatives with international frameworks such as the SDGs, CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality, and the EU Gender Action Plan III (GAP III).

3. Why a Regional Task Force?

Fragmentation of efforts remains one of the main obstacles to achieving gender equality in the agri-food sector. The proposed UfM–CIHEAM Regional Task Force on Women,



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Innovation and Food Systems, to be launched in 2026, will serve as the institutional mechanism to coordinate, monitor, and accelerate regional progress.

The Task Force will:

- Provide a shared platform for dialogue, cooperation, and policy alignment;
- Define a regional roadmap and operational framework for action;
- Facilitate the exchange of best practices and technical expertise;
- Develop a data-driven monitoring system using sex-disaggregated indicators to ensure accountability and policy coherence.

4. Priority Areas of Action (2026–2030)

The UfM–CIHEAM collaboration will focus on the following strategic actions:

- Support women-led agri-businesses and start-ups.
- Foster access to finance through gender-sensitive mechanisms.
- Strengthen digital and entrepreneurial capacities for women innovators.
- Integrate gender-transformative education within food systems curricula.
- Establish a Mediterranean Network of Women Innovators to connect entrepreneurs, researchers, and investors.
- Promote living labs and innovation hubs for rural inclusion.
- Integrate sex-disaggregated data collection and analysis into all projects.
- Engage civil society, youth networks, and local communities.
- Mobilise public and private partners to align investments with gender-responsive objectives.

5. Implementation and Governance

- The Task Force Launch Meeting (2026) will formalise its composition, governance structure, and roadmap.
- CIHEAM and UfM will act as co-convenors, ensuring synergy and complementarity between national and regional initiatives.



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- Partners will commit to joint monitoring and reporting through sex-disaggregated data and shared indicators.
- Annual progress reports will assess outcomes, lessons learned, and areas for scaling up.

6. Expected Results

By 2030, the CIHEAM–UfM cooperation aims to achieve:

- Increased number of women-led innovative enterprises in agri-food systems;
- Improved access to finance, markets, and leadership opportunities for women;
- Integration of gender-responsive innovation in regional and national policies;
- Strengthened evidence base through reliable sex-disaggregated data;
- Enhanced visibility of women's contributions to sustainable Mediterranean food systems.

7. Call for Collective Commitment

CIHEAM and the UfM invite all partners — governments, donors, international organisations, private actors, academia, and civil society — to join this regional endeavour.

The 2026 Task Force launch will mark the beginning of a new phase of coordinated regional action, translating shared political will into measurable progress for gender equality, innovation, and sustainable development.

Together, we will build a more inclusive, innovative, and resilient Mediterranean.