



Union for the Mediterranean
Union pour la Méditerranée
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Concept Note

UfM Employment Forum

14 -17 December 2026

Palermo, Italy

The UfM Secretariat will organize the first edition of its Employment Forum in Palermo, Italy, on 14 -17 December 2026, with a focus on entrepreneurship. The Forum will be co-organized with the German Development Cooperation (GIZ) and will benefit from the support of the European Commission (DG EMPL). The annual UfM Employment Forum is established by, and acts upon, the Union for the Mediterranean Action Plan on Employment and Labour 2026-2028 and is anchored to the UfM Vision Statement (Connecting and Engaging People Pillar) and the EU Pact for the Mediterranean.

With a strong focus on impact and scalability, the **UfM Employment Forum** will take place on **17 December**, providing a focused regional dialogue through targeted sessions and the launch of the **UfM Entrepreneurship Academy** in its pilot phase. The Forum will be preceded, from 14 to 16 December, by a series of complementary activities targeting entrepreneurs, young people and academic stakeholders, including *UfM Entrepreneurship Workshop*, the *UfM Community of Practice on Youth Employment*, the *“Entrepreneurship & Employability: From Degree to Ventures” workshop*, and the *UfM Med Youth Lab*.

Bringing together government officials, private sector actors, business support organizations, incubators and accelerators, entrepreneurs, civil society representatives, think tanks, mentors and trainers, the Forum will foster a dynamic multi-stakeholder environment. Through dedicated networking and synergy-building modalities, the overall programme will seek to move beyond dialogue towards concrete outcomes, strengthened partnerships, and scalable initiatives that can contribute to advancing employability across the Euro-Mediterranean region.

According to a 2025 PwC Middle East report, MENA startups alone raised a record \$7.5 billion across 647 companies in 2025, representing a 225% year-on-year increase in funding, with fintech emerging as the leading sector. Entrepreneurship not only turns job seekers into job creators, but also unlocks new business models that reinvent the regional economy. In addition, evidence from emerging economies shows that high-growth firms, including startups, create up to 60–65% of all new jobs, demonstrating the transformative impact of entrepreneurial ventures on employment.

This focus on entrepreneurship translates directly into the priorities set out in the UfM Action Plan on Employment and Labour 2026-2028, which calls for favourable conditions for private sector development and investment facilitation, strengthened microfinance to help micro and small enterprises scale up, a supportive environment for youth and women's entrepreneurship, and the promotion of the social economy and social finance as vectors of decent job creation.



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The Forum is expected to deliver concrete outcomes feeding into the broader UfM employment and labour agenda beyond Palermo. The pilot phase of the UfM Entrepreneurship Academy will be evaluated with a view to its consolidation and scale-up, and the networking held over the four days is intended to generate lasting partnerships between government officials, private sector actors, business support organizations and entrepreneurs. In line with the Action Plan's tasking to establish an annual UfM Forum on Employment and Labour, Palermo will set the template for future editions and feed into the UfM Work Programme and the Community of Practice on Youth Employment, ensuring the Forum's conclusions are carried forward into follow-up actions.

Registration [Link](#).