

# Mediterranean +25

## Priorities and recommendations

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Contribution to the renewed  
Mediterranean Agenda

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Ministry for Foreign Action, Institutional Relations and Transparency

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## Summary

This policy report presents the results, opinions and main points of the debates arising from the nearly 2,000 actors from the Euro-Mediterranean region participating in the Mediterranean +25 Initiative, thirteen conferences promoted by the Government of Catalonia between June and December 2020 in the framework of the commemoration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Barcelona Process.

During the conferences, some of the underlying causes and consequences of the current socio-economic, human development, governance and intercultural challenges in the region were identified. Different actors spoke on lessons learnt from the past, addressed potential cooperation opportunities in the region and stressed strategic policy recommendations. The COVID-19 crisis context provided the opportunity to focus on the challenges and potential future interactions between partners to overcome critical situations like the one brought about by the pandemics in the region.

Actually, the essence of this paper becomes now timelier in order to assess and guide upcoming policy actions and initiatives under the recently established framework of the new Agenda for the Mediterranean. One of the results of the debates and presentations is the identification of specific strategic priorities to focus on in the upcoming years. These specific strategic priorities coincide largely with the key policy orientations outlined in the recent Joint Communication adopted by the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, concerning «A renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood» and proposing a new Agenda for the Mediterranean.

Profiting from this renewed partnership scenario, this text wishes to showcase the proposals addressed by territorial stakeholders, networks and civil society institutions willing to contribute to the deployment of the Agenda for the Mediterranean.

## The Euro-Mediterranean context

Twenty-five years ago, the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference endorsed a Final Declaration that kick-started the **Barcelona Process**, undoubtedly one of the most important milestones at the time between Europe and the Southern Mediterranean partners. The evolution of the Barcelona Process was strengthened on the bilateral dimension by the launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2004, and on the regional dimension by the Union for the Mediterranean in 2008 as a general framework for the **Euro-Mediterranean Partnership**.

At present, the major socio-economic shocks brought on by the **COVID-19 pandemic** have aggravated long-existing political, economic, social, and security challenges in a region that has been affected in the past decade by shifting geopolitical trends and increased involvement of regional and global actors.

From a **geopolitical** standpoint, the new US Administration's recent decision to get back to multilateral agreements and mechanisms, along with President Biden's emphasis during the electoral campaign on the importance of cooperating with allies and creating regional synergies to achieve foreign policy goals, could easily imply a turning point in the Mediterranean region. Countries such as China, Russia, Iran, Turkey and the Gulf States have cemented their regional influence through military, economic and political cooperation during these late years. Power competition in the new multipolar scenario of the Mediterranean might guide US actions in the mid- and long-term on future economic and political cooperation with Mediterranean countries, including the European Union. This opportunity might bring new possibilities to boost the geopolitical influence of the Mediterranean region as a whole, as the US will need capable allies on the ground.

Furthermore, the emergence of the **African continent** as a political and economic bloc has weakened the Euro-Mediterranean partnership in light of a reinforced partnership between Europe and Africa that has gained centrality and momentum. The dichotomy lies whether the Mediterranean region can emerge as a new geopolitical and economic centre between Europe and Africa, or whether it will remain a peripheral area in this context.

In the fields of **human and sustainable development**, the region confronts at least five main challenges that affect all the countries alike, even if situations vary widely with some of the Southern Mediterranean countries in fragile contexts or openly in conflict. First,

***The Joint Communication on a Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood is a key policy of the European Union in light of changing strategic perspectives***

labour markets, unable to generate enough jobs for ordinary citizens, especially youngsters, and which exclude women massively from the labour force. Second, a climate emergency crisis that places the Mediterranean region as one of the most critical spots globally, and which requires speeding up the transition towards sustainable economies and societies. Third, a fragile and rapid urbanisation process, which highlights the vulnerabilities and inequalities

of societies with very high demographic growth rates. Fourth, stagnated economic models not geared towards innovation 4.0 or technological change, which might widen digital divide while triggering inequality. And finally, public administrations' inability to improve public policies' quality, unveiling enormous deficits in terms of public governance as a challenge that is crosscutting to all sectors.

Against this background, the European Union has now a new opportunity to revamp a mutually beneficial cooperation in more creative ways, feeding on lessons learned from current cooperation and the COVID-19 pandemic. From this perspective, the European Commission, jointly with the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, released on 9<sup>th</sup> February the **Joint Communication on a Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood**.

This **new Agenda for the Mediterranean** represents a new opportunity to bolster a key political, economic and social roadmap in light of changing strategic perspectives in the Mediterranean region. The EU's new Agenda for the region identifies five key policy priorities that will guide EU's foreign and neighbourhood policy towards the region, which touches upon the aforementioned human and sustainable development challenges while offering at the same time new opportunities for renewed partnerships on the ground. The perspective of the post-COVID-19 recovery offers key opportunities for the European Union to boost a green and digital transition while promoting a joint people-centred and inclusive recovery and development for the region. One of the lessons learnt during the pandemic is the mutual interdependence and shared vulnerabilities of the Mediterranean region as a whole. In this sense, by relaunching EU's political cooperation and offering tailored financial programmes and socio-economic cooperation instruments, the new Agenda for the Mediterranean aims to foster resilience, untap the economic and sustainable potential of the Mediterranean region and address its main challenges in the fields of human and socio-economic development.

## The Mediterranean +25 Initiative

The Mediterranean is a priority for Catalan foreign action. Consequently, the Government of Catalonia has envisaged the promotion of **Catalonia's Mediterranean Strategy, MedCat 2030**, and the development of a 2019-2022 Action Plan to allow for the renewal and reinforcement of the Catalan vision on the Mediterranean. In this framework, and on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Barcelona Declaration, the Government of Catalonia has promoted a series of **Mediterranean +25 initiatives** to address issues and offer proposals aimed at disseminating and renewing the vision on Euro-Mediterranean relations.

***On the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Barcelona Declaration, the Government of Catalonia has promoted a series of Mediterranean +25 initiatives aimed at disseminating and renewing the vision on Euro-Mediterranean relations***

The main purpose of such an Initiative has been to take stock of what these 25 years of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation have entailed for the region, while identifying policy recommendations for a renewed Mediterranean Agenda that may help set the region on an inclusive and sustainable path on key priority areas.

In collaboration with Euro-Mediterranean actors, networks and organisations, the Government of Catalonia consequently promoted different activities: the **Mediterranean +25 Dialogues**,

held from June to October 2020, and the **Mediterranean +25 Forums**, held between November-December 2020. These were fostered together with the **European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed)**.

The Initiative overall aimed to bring the Mediterranean project closer to citizens and to promote exchanges between Northern and Southern Mediterranean stakeholders. The major events promoted throughout November and December 2020 in relevant areas of the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation were organised by the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) ahead of the 5<sup>th</sup> UfM Regional Forum. During the Initiative, several actions were launched to encourage and facilitate programmes, networks and exchanges between 1,000 civil society actors from both shores of the Mediterranean willing to strengthen the role of multi-level governance in the Mediterranean.

### The Mediterranean +25 Dialogues

- A webinar entitled «**Digitalising Mediterranean Small and Medium Enterprises in a post-COVID-19 era**» (8 July 2020), organised in collaboration with the Catalan Ministry for Digital Policy and Public Administration and the Catalan Ministry of Business and Knowledge;
- A webinar entitled «**Understanding the impact of COVID-19 in the Southern Mediterranean: crafting Euro-Mediterranean policy responses**» (9 September 2020);
- A webinar entitled «**Rethinking Urban Resilience in a post-COVID-19 Mediterranean**» (29 September 2020), organised in collaboration with the Catalan Ministry of Territory and Sustainability;
- A hybrid conference entitled «**Mediterranean Intercultural Dialogues. Recognizing Ourselves in Others' Cultures**» (30 September 2020), organised in collaboration with the Public Diplomacy Council of Catalonia;
- A webinar conference entitled «**Localising the SDGs in the Mediterranean Region: alliances for a sustainability transition**» (22 October 2020), organised in collaboration with the Advisory Council for Sustainable Development of Catalonia.

### The Mediterranean +25 Forums

- An event entitled «**Building post-COVID equal, safe, and inclusive societies for women and girls**» (18 November 2020) was organised in collaboration with the Barcelona City Council as one of the side events of the UfM High-level Women4Mediterranean Conference 2020;
- An on-line conference entitled «**Towards a Renovated Regional Strategy for the Mediterranean +25**» (24 November 2020) was organised in collaboration with the Med Cooperation Alliance, an informal network of networks that facilitates transnational multi-level governance in the Mediterranean and brings together the Inter-Mediterranean Commission (IMC) of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), the Euro-Region Pyrénées-Méditerranée, MedCities, the Latin Arch, and the Adriatic Ionian Euro-Region.
- The **Youth and Climate in the Mediterranean +25 Virtual Forum** (9-11 December 2020) was organised in collaboration with several relevant institutions and Mediterranean networks such as: the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean, the Assembly of Citizens of the Mediterranean Foundation, the CPMR's Inter-Mediterranean Commission, the European Institute of the Mediterranean, MedCities, the Regional Government of Sousse and the Mediterranean Youth Climate Network, among others.

## Priorities for a Mediterranean +25 Agenda

### Consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic: reinforced cooperation

The COVID-19 pandemic is far more than a health crisis: it is affecting societies and economies at their core. While the impact of the pandemic varies from country to country, it certainly increased poverty and inequalities on both shores of the Mediterranean. Assessing the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on societies, economies and vulnerable groups in particular is crucial to tailor the responses of governments and partners to recover from the crisis and ensure that no one is left behind in this effort. The COVID-19 crisis represents a historical moment in which solidarity, strong cooperation and shared strategies Europe-wide with Southern partners are essential in order to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on public health systems, society on the whole and the economy.

*The EU should work on its strategic interdependence and strengthen cooperation with Southern Mediterranean countries to increase resilience on both shores*

The COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated pre-existing economic, financial, humanitarian and political crises. During the pandemic, these were exacerbated by massive business closures, a decrease in sales and salary cuts. In the need for economic reforms and serious action to stop systemic corruption, no economic solution will make a difference in the long run in the absence of **structural reforms**.

The COVID-19 crisis represents an opportunity to **decentralise governments**. Local authorities and municipalities, which see themselves mainly as service providers, should seize the opportunity offered by the crisis and find their place along with central administrations, thus underlining the crucial role of the state in protecting and prioritising citizens' health over any economic interest. In this respect, the COVID-19 could be regarded as a particular opportunity to restore the trust bond between citizens and the state for a cohesive, inclusive and responsible society. The EU should work on its strategic interdependence and strengthen cooperation with Southern Mediterranean countries to increase resilience at both shores. International and national support should prioritise most vulnerable groups, such as minorities, women, prisoners, refugees and internally displaced people, as they are the most affected by the pandemic.

### 2030 Agenda: Priorities for a sustainability transition

In the context marked by the unprecedented health crisis of the COVID-19 and its dramatic socio-economic impacts, implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) should be more than ever at the core of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, including the European Neighbourhood Policy and the post-COVID-19 recovery strategies.

***Implementing the SDGs should be more than ever at the core of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, including the European Neighbourhood Policy, and the post-COVID-19 recovery strategies***

preserve the area's natural capital; 2) promoting and supporting the transition of the Mediterranean economies towards a circular economy; and finally, 3) supporting a multi-level, participatory, and effective governance in the Euro-Mediterranean area.

Given their crosscutting dimension and their transformative potential, three priorities should structure regional strategies to recover from the COVID-19 crisis and speed up the transitions towards sustainability in the Mediterranean for the ten years to come. These priorities have been marked as a fundamental condition to advance towards the delivery of the 2030 Agenda in the region. 1) Reforming and reshaping economy-nature interactions in the Euro-Mediterranean region to

### **Climate action: supporting the youth**

The Mediterranean is one of the most vulnerable regions in the world and lately, even faster climate change has exacerbated already existing environmental challenges and hardships. In

***There is a need to provide for tools and a space for the Mediterranean youth to work together, develop their projects ideas and establish joint actions to face up to the effects of climate change and promote social transformations***

recent times, young people have poured into the streets in order to demand greater action to address the climate emergency. This youth-led protest movement is demanding climate action in many places and in large numbers around the world as has never been seen before, shaping the discussion on climate change. There is a need to provide for tools and a space for the Mediterranean youth to work together on different climate-related areas, develop their projects ideas, and establish joint actions to face up to the effects of climate change and promote social transformations.

### **Rethinking urban resilience in a post-COVID-19 Mediterranean**

***Mediterranean cities should re-think and strengthen their resilience to better cope with crises and shocks and further advance in the path towards sustainable urban development***

In the Mediterranean region, where urban development has been fastest than anywhere worldwide, cities are crucial agents for the implementation of the SDGs and main actors for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. Urban spaces are on the frontline against today's and tomorrow's challenges in the Mediterranean region: urban development; climate change; socio-economic inequalities; the energetic, green and digital transitions, and good governance. The recent

COVID-19 pandemic has proven that urban spaces should strengthen their resilience to better cope with crises and shocks and further advance in the path towards sustainable urban development.

## **Equal, safe and inclusive societies for women and girls**

***In the harsh scenario of severe gender-based disparities, Mediterranean cities and regions have become hubs of resilience, giving way to numerous examples of transformative best practices***

The pandemic has a larger negative impact over women and girls worldwide: it has indeed aggravated domestic violence and has brought about greater economic insecurity for women. All this, together with insufficient access of women and girls to essential health care, has exacerbated existing socio-economic inequalities. These, combined with intersectional discrimination and stigma, shape a harsh scenario of severe gender-based disparities.

The Mediterranean context illustrates to what extent civil society movements have taken advantage of this very complex scenario to foster solidarity networks and put in place initiatives that have mitigated locally the negative effects of the pandemic. Mediterranean cities and regions have become hubs of resilience, giving way to numerous examples of transformative best practices that may be demonstrative of the trend throughout the region.

## **Digitalising Mediterranean Small and Medium Enterprises: a path towards innovation development in a post-COVID-19 era**

SMEs are the backbone of Mediterranean economies, employing almost 60% of the total employed population. Despite their relevance for national economies, SMEs and

***Mediterranean SMEs will need growing support from international and national public actors to set up the right policies to facilitate their digital transformation***

entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean, particularly in the Southern economies, face multiple obstacles. Their growth and resilience are slowed down by difficult access to funding, slow integration into international and regional value chains, and a high informality index, among others. Against this background, the digital transition is opening up perspectives for improved performances, innovation, growth, rising competitiveness and inclusive and sustainable development. The COVID-19

pandemic has undoubtedly accelerated this trend, with digitalisation becoming a synonym for reaction, flexibility and resilience. Support for the Mediterranean SMEs' digital transformation at this crucial moment becomes a major challenge for the Mediterranean Agenda in the region.

## A shared intercultural strategy

In the Mediterranean region, values such as pluralism, inclusion, dignity and recognition are increasingly emerging as drivers for building spaces addressing major social threats such as climate change, hate speech, conflict, disagreement and xenophobia. In spite of this, during the last decade no common Euro-Mediterranean intercultural strategy came into

***Dialogue is one of the most relevant tools for building intercultural relations, together with culture, the real engine for social and economic development***

light. It's time to invest on a renewed human Euro-Med approach based on the pillars of intercultural dialogue. There is a need for a political recognition of dialogue which, together with culture, is the real engine for social and economic development in the region. There is a need to support them as the key crosscutting mechanisms able to create intercultural partnership between Mediterranean societies. This will ease the way for a real and transformative social agenda with a clear and positive impact on citizenry and on their rights.

## Towards a renovated regional strategy for the Mediterranean +25

Since the Barcelona Process was launched, large-scale international projects as well as a great number of local and regional initiatives have been contributing to create a consolidated network for cooperation. That's why, in the framework for cooperation, the issue of governance is fundamental.

Macro-regionalization processes and multi-level governance in the region are offering a common framework to foster synergies and complementarities among already existing initiatives, programmes and governance structures. The effective implementation of the Agenda for the Mediterranean should encourage the deepening of socio-economic sustainability at the territorial level. This means providing institutional and financial resources for setting innovative, experimental and multi-level governance mechanisms at

***Talking about the Mediterranean Cooperation Alliance, local and regional authorities can play a key role in the search for greater coordination among existing transnational frameworks***

the regional level that can steer the definition and the implementation of more effective and legitimated transnational policies.

Talking about a recently created platform, the Mediterranean Cooperation Alliance (MCA), local and regional authorities – and their networks – can play a key role in the search for greater coordination among already existing transnational frameworks, eventually under the macro-regional perspective.

## Mediterranean +25. Main policy recommendations

### Localising the SDGs in the Mediterranean region: priorities for a sustainability transition

In the Mediterranean region, the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda is particularly necessary, as this area experiences chronic political, economic, social and environmental struggle. Despite many private and public actors working towards real inclusive and sustainable change in the Mediterranean, the region is still lagging in most of the targets set for each SDG. With only ten years left to achieve the 2030 Agenda goals, time has come to give them a push in the region to improve the well-being, inclusiveness, peace and security among the Mediterranean communities and territories.

In this context marked by the unprecedented health crisis of the COVID-19 and its dramatic socio-economic impacts, implementing the SDGs should be more than ever at the core of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, including the European Neighbourhood Policy and the post-COVID-19 recovery strategies. This is why the Government of Catalonia identified three policy priorities -with their respective recommendations- which, given their crosscutting nature and their transformative potential, should **structure regional strategies to recover from the COVID-19 crisis and speed up the transition towards sustainability in the Mediterranean for the ten years to come.**

#### **Priority 1 - Intervene, reform and reshape economy-nature interactions in the Euro-Mediterranean region to preserve the natural capital in the region as a promise of Mediterranean prosperity**

Regional stakeholders are urged to work together to take common actions to link the economic prosperity of the Mediterranean to the preservation of its environment, the safeguarding of its biodiversity and natural ecosystems, and the sustainable management of its natural resources, thus helping local and regional economies to embrace a sustainable productive model.

- Place the preservation of the environment at the core of any negotiations of **future deep and comprehensive free trade agreements** in the Euro-Mediterranean region.
- Implement **regional standards** that could discourage Mediterranean industries from an **unsustainable exploitation of natural resources**.
- Adopt a long-term and integrated approach for the management of natural resources considering all relevant interactions between their usages.

- Put a **value on the services provided by the Mediterranean ecosystems** and remunerate local communities for services rendered to the ecosystems.
- Work towards the introduction of **regional monitoring systems** to assess the **health of marine and coastal ecosystems** as well as the **impact of different industries** on the Mediterranean biosphere.
- Step up efforts to promote and advance a **sustainable agenda for tourism**, an essential economic sector for the region, to reduce its negative environmental impact. This action should be achieved notably through **planning instruments** designed to manage human activities in natural areas considering the ecosystems, the landscapes in their interactions; seize the COVID-19 crisis as **an opportunity to reinvent the sector** and link its prosperity to the preservation of the Mediterranean environment.
- Establish **regional policy networks** to intensify social and economic ties based on **blue economy** foundations.
- Boost the creation of **Mediterranean biospheres** for a better coexistence between economic activities and natural preservation.

## **Priority 2 - Promote and support the transition of the Mediterranean economies towards a circular economy as a condition to advance towards economic resilience and sustainability in the region**

Regional stakeholders are called to define common and multi-level strategies to promote and implement concrete actions **to move from an intense extractive linear model towards a circular economy**. This would prevent the creation of waste, environmental pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, natural resources depletion, while **creating decent jobs and inclusive economic prosperity**, notably by **harnessing the full potential offered by new technologies**.

- Accelerate the implementation of the **European Green Deal measures in the Southern EU Neighbourhood** and increase the target of funds dedicated to climate-related objectives within the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI).
- Create **Mediterranean standards** on best available production techniques and practices, product policy and environmental management practices.
- Promote **awareness raising** campaigns to educate the populations, new generations and entrepreneurs on best environmental practices and resource efficiency.
- Create **conducive business environments and legal frameworks** for the development and growth of the green and circular economy sector, by providing support and incentives to green entrepreneurs (dedicated BSOs, incubation and acceleration services, facilitated access to knowledge, finance and market), as advocated by the Regional Action Plan on Sustainable and Consumption and Production.

- Favour **long-term investments with positive socio-economic effects** (e.g. better employment opportunities, notably for the youth and women, or more environmentally sustainable facilities).
- Support **innovation** and harness new **digital technologies** to improve **resource efficiency**, reduce waste (smart bins), enhance recycling and remanufacturing.
- Prevent waste creation in the first place by facilitating the creation of **Mediterranean trading platforms for the secondary materials market** that can allow producers to transparently access such products.
- Limit the production and usage of plastics by proposing an **effective fiscal policy** making certain virgin materials more expensive than secondary ones, and by **phasing out single-use plastics** in the short-term in the region.
- Create a **Mediterranean strategy** for a cleaner, renewable, affordable, more secure, efficient and resilient **energy system**, including the creation of an integrated electricity market in the Mediterranean.

### **Priority 3 - Promote a multi-level, participatory, and effective governance in the Euro-Mediterranean as a fundamental condition to advance towards the delivery of the 2030 Agenda in the region**

The creation of Euro-Mediterranean alliances between regional agents for change is necessary to **promote good governance**, foster mechanisms of **multi-level cooperation** between local, regional and national authorities and **the involvement of civil societies and local communities** in decision-making processes. Thus, giving a voice to those politically, economically and socially marginalised (the youth, women, minorities, etc.) to **ensure greater equality and that no one is left behind**.

- Encourage **multi-stakeholder dialogue** between government authorities at the local and regional levels, academia and private sector for effective dialogue, cooperation and improved science-policy-society interface.
- Promote **decentralisation** by considering **local and regional authorities (LRAs)** as crucial agents for sustainable change, grasping local realities and challenges: direct cooperation funds and capacity-building actions towards LRAs to respond to their lack of resources.
- Foster mechanisms of real and effective **multi-level governance**: create more spaces for LRAs to participate in decision-making processes regarding global policies on issues of their competence (i.e. LRAs implement 65% of the targets within the 2030 Agenda); reinforce the **role of LRAs' networks** in bringing the voice of subnational governments in supranational fora.
- Adopt people-centred agendas: promote **bottom-up participatory approaches** involving local communities and account for diversity in decision-making processes.

- **Reverse dynamics on closing space for civil society** in order to build vibrant, inclusive, cohesive and peaceful societies.
- **Enhance gender equality** on both shores of the Mediterranean by intervening with policies that promote equal opportunities, jobs, and salaries, better social assistance, and women's political empowerment.

## Rethinking urban resilience in a post-COVID-19 Mediterranean

In the Mediterranean region urban development rates are the fastest worldwide. Cities are then crucial agents for the implementation of the SDGs and must be regarded as such by the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation actors. Responsible for the delivery of many policies related to the SDGs, they are on the frontline against today's and tomorrow's challenges in the region: urban development; climate change; socio-economic inequalities; the energetic, green and digital transitions, and good governance. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has proven that Mediterranean cities should rethink and strengthen their resilience to better cope with crises and shocks and further advance in the path towards sustainable urban development.

### Policy Recommendations

- **Put the concept of resilience at the core of urban development**, ensuring that resilience leads towards sustainability, and reinforcing the integration of risk management in city planning, the adoption of integrated approaches between resilience and sustainability and long-term vision. Mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda into urban policy-making should become a clear priority.
- **Build and implement sound economic diversification strategies in Mediterranean cities.** The COVID-19 pandemic has proven that the most specialised cities were the most vulnerable ones in case of a crisis. A possible and highly desired movement of relocalisation of supply chains to the region would constitute a not to be missed opportunity to diversify, provided that necessary measures are taken to encourage this movement and drive it towards sustainable industries.
- **Encourage and promote the development of short and circular production and distribution chains.** Strengthening short food circuits around and within Mediterranean cities (including urban agriculture), reinforcing the linkages between cities and their immediate hinterland (including thanks to sustainable transport corridors) are ways to contribute to a more balanced territorial development, enhance food security, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

- **Reclaim the Mediterranean and local urbanistic heritage and culture** (e.g. medinas in Arab cities) to develop innovative solutions for urban planning, accessible and sustainable housing as well as greater social cohesion.
- **Rethink urban planning in favour of more compact cities.** With the adoption of “social distancing” measures, the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced arguments in favour of urban spread. However, one must not forget that compact cities are the most sustainable urban forms (more social cohesion and urban vitality, reduced emissions and energy consumption, preservation of natural resources and agricultural lands), provided that they are centred on human well-being.
- **Green the Mediterranean cities:** Promote the return of nature to the cities and nature-based solutions to fight urban heat island effects and pollutions, improve citizens’ well-being and quality of life, while encouraging urban agriculture and incentivizing cleaner and sustainable urban mobility.
- **Harness the potential of new information and communication technologies to develop and spread a model of «Smart Mediterranean Cities»**, increasing resilience and sustainability through the collection and use of data for better city planning, sustainable use of resources and enhanced risk forecast and management.
- **Foster decentralisation, multi-level governance and participatory approaches as crucial engines for sustainable urban development.** Local governments are key to ensure the implementation of the 2030 Agenda but face a significant lack of resources in the Mediterranean. National reforms and international cooperation need to empower local governments, channel funds and provide capacity building to local governments, providing them with the tools to build resilient and sustainable cities.
- **Support more regional and decentralised cooperation, multiply partnerships, synergies and build alliances** between regional stakeholders to foster the exchange of knowledge and experience, identify and promote best practices, building upon the work of existing networks (MedCities, Agency for Sustainable Mediterranean Cities and Territories (AVITEM), United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and platforms (UfM).

## Digitalising Mediterranean Small and Medium Enterprises: a path towards innovation development in a post-COVID-19 era

SMEs are the backbone of Mediterranean economies. They account for around 95% of all firms in absolute figures, covering almost 60% of total employment. Despite their relevance for national economies, SMEs and entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean, particularly in the Southern economies, face multiple obstacles. Their growth and resilience are hindered by difficult access to finance, slow integration into international as well as regional value chains, and a high rate of informality, among others. Against this background, the digital transition is opening up perspectives for improved performances, innovation, growth, increased competitiveness, as well as for inclusive and sustainable development. The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly accelerated this trend, with digitalisation becoming a synonym for reaction, flexibility and resilience. To live up to this challenge, Mediterranean SMEs will need increased support from international and national public actors to set up the right policies to facilitate their digital transformation.

### Policy Recommendations

- **Euro-Mediterranean partners should enhance their efforts to improve the Mediterranean SMEs ecosystem:** harmonise regulations, share best practices, incentivise the establishment of new SMEs, and improve access to finance.
- **Create Mediterranean digital solutions and matchmaking platforms** that could connect regional entrepreneurs and SMEs to available financial opportunities, business development services, training and mentoring programmes.
- **Enhance the role of local and regional authorities in the promotion of digitalisation.** These public entities have the potential to better connect with the local private sector, making central governments' programmes more effective and efficient.
- **Push for more efficient and accessible e-government services to ease administrative processes.**
- **Increase the cooperation between the public sphere, universities and the private sector** to encourage technology and knowledge transfer.
- **Reinforce intellectual property rights, patent protection and competition law.** This could facilitate the entrance of new firms into the ecosystem, fighting high market concentration.
- **Increase and sustain access to credit for entrepreneurship and SMEs.** Throughout the pandemic, governments of both the Southern and Northern Mediterranean have worked with financial intermediaries like Credit Guarantee Schemes and Microfinance institutions to maintain their credit lines, enhancing their reporting activities and expand their portfolio by increasing risk appetite and relaxing

entry requirements. These changes adopted in the past few months could set the example for future strategies.

- **Improve connectivity and access to affordable broadband.** Even though the vast territories of some North African countries pose concrete limits to the expansion of internet access, many densely populated areas in the region still lack a fast-reliable internet connection. Accurate investments could bridge this digital gap.
- **Enhance cooperation among different stakeholders** like civil society, private sector representatives, the public sphere, and international and regional institutions.
- **Pay further attention to those segments of society that are underserved and particularly excluded from the digitalisation process.**

## Mediterranean intercultural dialogue: recognizing ourselves in others' cultures

Culture has a key role in bridging and enhancing Euro-Mediterranean relations. The role of Mediterranean societies and cultures in addressing global challenges through dialogue and knowledge-sharing is crucial to advance in the recovery of the post-COVID-19 pandemic. The values of pluralism, inclusion, dignity and recognition are increasingly emerging as drivers for building spaces for reconciliation and dialogue and addressing real threats such as climate change, hate speech, conflict, disagreement and xenophobia. Dialogue is one of the most relevant tools for building intercultural relations, which together with culture, the real engine for social and economic development, both stand out as key mechanisms to promote understanding and create peaceful relationships on the two shores of the Mediterranean.

However, during the last decade no common Euro-Mediterranean intercultural strategy came into light, making it necessary to invest on a renewed Euro-Med strategy based on the pillars of intercultural dialogue and mutual knowledge. A common strategy in the Mediterranean will allow countries to adapt to current challenges and transformations, moving towards the creation of a prosperous, stable and diverse peaceful region.

### Policy Recommendations

- **Capitalise on instances of coexistence and mutual collaboration between Mediterranean countries.**
- **Generate more meeting spaces and activities that promote interaction.** Promote activities that go beyond «minimizing» difference and ethnocentrism. Create an interactive and plural public space where diversity is regarded as beneficial, always paired with respect for human rights and dignity.

- **Support participatory processes.** Include and give voice to citizens, young people and women from diverse cultural backgrounds, not only as end beneficiaries but throughout the participatory process, and launch initiatives for trans-regional democracy and participatory construction.
- **Increase programs and initiatives to combat discrimination and exclusion** by ensuring equity and access to resources without distinction of race, religion, nationality or sex.
- **Introduce strategies to promote equal rights and opportunities as well as equal access to universal rights**, such as education or health care. Develop binding commitment documents prepared by working groups on inclusion and diversity in institutions. Create an effective and extensive programme of opportunities against early school leaving targeting certain groups of young people of immigrant origin and, especially, neighbourhoods and schools qualified as of high complexity.
- **Combat stereotypes** in public schools, education systems from an early age, and in the media. Work with an inclusive methodology **avoiding stigmatization**. Systematic and in-depth review of the contents on topics related to Mediterranean cultures.
- **Promote knowledge through exchange and education. Language learning and translation policies** in the region play an important role in promoting knowledge and better understanding among the peoples of the Euro-Mediterranean countries. Introduce dynamics and contents to include active listening in educational programs.
- **Develop actions and programmes to give value to diversity and cultural identities, minorities and to promote respect in host societies.** Assess the contribution of migrants, both for the host community and for the minorities themselves. Take action to increase self-esteem for one's own culture while increasing knowledge of and appreciation for the host community's culture. Explore trans-local relationships of immigrants, the kind of relations they keep with their home countries and how those can become an intercultural element in the Mediterranean.
- **Take into account regional differences and local sensitivities** in cultural relations and cooperation by adapting the action to particular cultural contexts and interests.
- **Promote work in multicultural teams and the exchange of best practices and knowledge beyond differences;** get to know each other better and establish links.
- **Encourage mobility of workers**, cultural operators and training of cultural actors, journalists and mediators for the citizens and avoid the spread of stereotypes and the creation of prejudices based on contents.
- **Create and support networks for intercultural dialogue and cooperation of journalists, women, young people, educators and mediators.** Give priority to actors especially involved in demanding change and opening spaces. Create a Communication Observatory in which networks and journalists are integrated and where the situation of professionals, both at work and in human rights matters, is monitored.

- **Create inclusive initiatives based on cross-border youth leadership programmes** that explore democratisation and the different struggles taken up by civic society actors, particularly by the young.
- **Promote equal opportunities for volunteering and continue to promote the mobility of young people** in the Euro-Med region.

## Building post-COVID equal, safe, and inclusive societies for women and girls. How can Mediterranean regions and cities take the lead?

Worldwide, the pandemic has a larger negative impact over women and girls than over their male counterparts. The pandemic has indeed intensified domestic violence on account of confinement, and has brought about greater economic insecurity for women (who tend to assume the responsibilities associated to care and domestic chores). All this, together with insufficient access of women and girls to essential health care, has exacerbated existing socio-economic inequalities. Such inequalities, combined with intersectional discrimination and stigma, give way to a harsh scenario of severe gender-based disparities.

At the same time, and without losing sight of the above-mentioned hardships, the Mediterranean context illustrates to what extent civil society movements have taken advantage of this very complex scenario to foster solidarity networks and put in place initiatives that have locally mitigated the negative effects of the pandemic. Mediterranean cities have become hubs of resilience, giving way to numerous examples of transformative best practices that may be demonstrative of the trend throughout the region.

### Policy Recommendations

- **Build a common Euro-Mediterranean political agenda based on a multi-actor network of alliances.** The multi-level approach facilitates the tailoring of specific responses that can account for the different needs of women and girls in the region.
- **Reinforce a Euro-Mediterranean gender approach in the transnational agreements led by subnational actors.** The gender perspective must be cross-sectional.
- **Support vulnerable actors in the recovery funds to be put in place in the Euro-Mediterranean context in the post-COVID scenario.** This measure takes into account: a) that women have been in the frontline throughout the pandemic, as they have been a majority in sectors most exposed to the virus, and b) that the hardships of societal sectors in situations of vulnerability (i. e. migrant women, women with functional diversity and with mental health disorders, victims of gender-based violence) have widened.

- **Create the conditions to raise women’s participation and leadership in public life and decision-making processes at local, regional, and national and international levels.** This is key to counter gender inequalities, as it paves the way for feminist and cross-sectional policies that ensure a more egalitarian and sustainable social tissue in Euro-Mediterranean cities and regions.
- **Foster the implementation of legal and policy frameworks to eradicate all forms of gender-based violence and establish follow-up mechanisms that ensure that such frameworks are effectively enforced.** The pandemic has brought about a significant raise of different types of gender-based violence, including cyber violence.
- **Adopt a holistic approach to work-life balance in order to improve the situation as it currently stands.** This entails creating the necessary conditions to ensure that an equal balance of care and domestic responsibilities is promoted, whereby men adopt the role of caregivers and have equal domestic responsibilities than women; raising awareness about women’s heavier burden –more acute due to the pandemic and its impact on all spheres of life-, and combating gender stereotypes.
- **Ensure the visibilisation and circulation of all kinds of practices, strategies and actions that have already made a positive impact in countering the negative toll of the COVID-19 pandemic.** Mediterranean regions and cities are brimming with transformative initiatives that aim to build safer and more inclusive societies, and which can be capitalized on.
- **Foster the establishment of monitoring mechanisms that ensure that common agendas**, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, are met, in particular their commitment to protect human rights and to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (SDG 5).
- **Tailor laws and policies that are informed by a bottom-up approach which consider civil society a key actor in the region**, and support transparency as a key element to involve citizens in political life.

## Towards a renovated Regional Strategy for the Mediterranean +25

Since the Barcelona Process was launched, large-scale international projects as well as a great number of local and regional initiatives have been contributing to create a consolidated network for cooperation. That’s why in the framework for cooperation, the issue of governance is fundamental.

The implementation of innovative governance schemes is even more difficult in the Mediterranean, where reforms often stall, fail and even reverse. In this regard, macro-regionalisation processes in the region are indeed trying to innovate the *modus operandi* of transnational cooperation dynamics by offering a common framework to foster synergies and complementarities among already existing initiatives, programmes and governance structures.

The effective implementation of the Agenda for the Mediterranean should encourage the deepening of socio-economic sustainability at the territorial level. This means providing institutional and financial resources for setting innovative, experimental and multi-level governance mechanisms at the regional level that can steer the definition and the implementation of more effective and legitimated transnational policies.

Talking about the Mediterranean Cooperation Alliance, it is clear that local and regional authorities – and their networks – can play a key role in the search for greater coordination among already existing transnational frameworks, eventually under the macro-regional perspective.

## Policy Recommendations

- **The 2030 Agenda is an inspiring framework to address the urgent challenges that the Mediterranean region currently confronts.** The debate on the implementation of the SDGs calls on the principles of policy coherence, multi-level governance and localisation (place-based approach). The effective achievement of the SDGs in the Mediterranean requires a strong support to a greater involvement of regional and local authorities in decision-making processes as well as in the definition and management of EU and Mediterranean programmes.
- **Strengthen Mediterranean cooperation as an instrument for sustainability and inclusive development.** There is an imperative need to foster Mediterranean solidarity on the one hand, and global environmental sustainability, both socially and economy-wise, on the other, a reality underlined by today's crisis in the Mediterranean region. To address this situation, it is necessary to create and share quality network spaces with the aim of reducing inequalities through more committed economic development that promotes the partnership between main regional networks. Mediterranean cities have a shared working methodology and need to reflect on the Mediterranean of the future and certainly of the post-COVID-19 era. International cooperation is an instrument with a role in local development and may be useful in promoting regions and cities working for decentralisation and democracy.
- **Define the framework of the macro-region to ensure a coordinated approach in order to strengthen synergies between existing initiatives.** The Mediterranean is brimming with concrete initiatives, programmes and actions that seek the participation of different government authorities. Better synergies and greater coordination are currently necessary in the Mediterranean, and the macro-regional framework may facilitate a new emphasis on territory and governance, improving cooperation between different authorities.
- **Multi-level, network and collaborative governance models.** A renovated cooperative political culture is required that promotes broad political consensus and improves autonomy at the different levels of government, administrative and technical capacity, exploiting to the fullest the perks of decentralization. EU institutions must continue to offer formal frameworks that incentivise experimental (but accountable)

models of governance. Central governments must assure long-term political support and must involve local and regional authorities in the negotiation of domestic policy-making related to territorial and trans-national policies. Local and regional authorities must increase and/or benefit from increased administrative and institutional capacities in order to consolidate their ability in policy delivering.

- **Consolidate and increase awareness about the Mediterranean Cooperation Alliance** through effective and participatory actions. There is a need to foster a leadership approach as a key element that will bring policy-making closer to citizens. The crux is the multi-level nature of the Alliance, where a wide range of local, supra-local and national government authorities coexist, availing gateways for the implementation of policies and funds on the ground, whilst at the same time contributing to report local realities to higher authorities. This guarantees different scales of intervention and more efficiency for initiatives.

## Virtual Forum on Youth and Climate in the Mediterranean +25

The Mediterranean is one of the most vulnerable regions in the world to the impacts of global warming, as it is warming faster than the global average by 20%. Lately, even faster climate change has exacerbated already existing environmental challenges and hardships in the Mediterranean basin caused by the combination of changes in land use, increase in pollution and biodiversity losses.

In recent times, young people, worried about their future on an overheated planet and aware they will have to bear the disproportionate burden of the most devastating effects of climate change, have poured into the streets in order to demand greater action to address the climate emergency. This youth-led protest is demanding climate action in many places and in large numbers around the world as has never been seen before, shaping the discussion on climate change.

There is a need to provide for tools and a space for the Mediterranean youth to work together on different climate-related areas, develop their projects ideas, and establish joint actions to combat climate change and promote social transformations.

### Policy Recommendations

- **Activism, social movements and civil society:** There is an urgent need to promote joint international action through digitalisation in order to overcome hampers on mobility, such as the COVID-19, whilst enhancing alliances and networking amongst movements and organisations to align concrete goals when dealing with an issue as crucial as climate change. An effective way to foster sustainable activism and a better approach to climate emergency in the Mediterranean might be not to work it separately, but to bind it with other social, global justice and human rights struggles.

- **Cities, young people and sustainability:** The deeper the human footprint left in cities, the more imperative the action to take, for example managing the efficiency of resources. Mediterranean cities should grow equitably and distribute green spaces and basic services in order to ensure sustainable access and mobility for all. Recognising the key role that local governments play in satisfying all citizens' needs means designing suitable participation platforms for young people and fostering social and educational policies that protect vulnerable groups and reflect on social diversity characteristic to us.
- **Digitalisation and innovative solutions** against climate emergency. The gap between the Southern and Northern Mediterranean countries should be bridged by extensive use of Euro-Med multilateral collaboration and youth-led digital dialogue platforms, creating virtual exchange opportunities, digital tools for the youth and taking advantage of social media platforms to reach large audiences of activists and decision-makers. There is an urgent call for shifting the global narrative through binding economic development to climate crisis, thus pushing people to pick their priorities and to take on responsibility.
- **Global justice, migration and gender:** There is a bad need for a sustainable model: renewable energies, full protection of civil and economic rights for all, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 10% per year, and democratic planning of economy. Such changes will only come through social mobilisation and civil disobedience, never through delivery by institutions. Climate justice is necessarily crosscutting; it is either that, or nothing. Climate change must be tackled cross-sectionally, as the impacts of crises are uneven across the region.
- **Influence the decision-making process:** Knowing that both grassroots and implication at the local and at the international levels are necessary and mutually benefiting to one another, the youth's participation in regional networks and initiatives is key to ensure capitalisation on actual synergies. The youth's participation in the decision-making process is a matter of democratic governance. It is urgent that public authorities involve young people in the decision-making process and enhance communication strategies regarding climate policies and actions undertaken, while supporting all the same local and regional organisations in the creation of further spaces for the youth that encourage their participation.
- **Transformative economies:** Platforms and ecosystems aimed at promoting transformative economies should be fostered both regionally and locally, enhancing joint work alliances between territorial communities and civil society organisations, and consolidating networks throughout the Mediterranean region. Public institutions can play a very important role in fostering transformative economies taking into account the demands of the civil society actors involved, while reinforcing and transforming young people's initiatives on economic sustainable development into public policies. Thanks to the media and social networks, young people can increase their involvement through awareness-raising activities in sectors within their interests (i. e. sports, culture, art, education, mobility, etc.).

- **ARTivism.** Young people's voices need to be heard, and they will be so; youngsters want to share their experiences on climate change emergency in the Mediterranean. Since ART is such an effective communication and networking tool, as it provides a space for young people to express themselves, artistic and cultural spaces should be bolstered to display young artists' movements against climate change.

## **Mediterranean youth climate declaration: the next 25 years**

At the closure of the Youth & Climate in the Mediterranean +25 Virtual Forum, several participants involved in the workshops issued a Declaration. They summarized the main proposals and hopes for the future of the Mediterranean Youth Movement for Climate Emergency.

### **Mediterranean youth climate declaration**

We, the Mediterranean youth that have gathered for the Youth & Climate in the Mediterranean +25 Virtual Forum, organised by the Government of Catalonia on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Barcelona Process, declare that:

There is more room for the use of technology and digital solutions in the fight against climate change. Social networks allow to strengthen communities and create working networks across the Mediterranean. Technology affords practical solutions to combat climate challenge. Even if the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the process of digitalisation, we need to go a step further.

There's a need to further include young people in political decision-making processes, enhancing both formal and informal engagement as well as advocacy, especially at the grassroots levels, and building virtual spaces for participation. Administrations must be accountable for their climate-related actions and guarantee transparency. They should better inform the public about what opportunities the youth and citizens generally are offered to engage in local policy actions.

In order to be truly transformative, the fight against climate change needs to be interdisciplinary and incorporate an artistic perspective outside the mainstream academic and political focuses. It is necessary to emphasize on the common cultural heritage and to overcome the differences across cultures and nations throughout the Mediterranean so as to generate a truly transformative and integrating engagement among the youth as regards climate-related issues.

Climate change in the Mediterranean stems directly from an economic productive system that predeates resources and depletes nature, while being unable to meet the needs of all, especially of the young. We need an entirely new model that promotes a solidarity economy, agro-ecology through women's empowerment, and cooperation between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

Because of their increasing relevance in the new scenario, cities need to re-formulate their current production and consumption patterns, as well as their models of environmental

management, and start a transformation towards more sustainable models. By creating spaces and mechanisms for local action, cities across the region will contribute to the preservation of all of the various Mediterranean environments.

We need more spaces for discussion and for young climate activists to be heard out. Ignoring or repressing non-violent climate activism can only damage democracy and our future. Activists must be heard out and deserve respect. Otherwise, the democratic arena for discussion will be seriously compromised.

The fight against climate change needs to incorporate the fight against other oppressive structures like neo-colonialism or patriarchy, so apparent in our region and in the North-South inter-Mediterranean relations. Because climate change affects unequally people from different backgrounds and conditions, we need a more global, holistic and crosscutting approach.

We, the Mediterranean youth, encourage every reader of this Declaration to share in it and to act accordingly. We expect this Declaration to have an impact on the social and political spheres globally, but especially across the Mediterranean basin.

## Mediterranean +25. Organisers and partners

### Organisers

- Government of Catalonia. Ministry for Foreign Action, Institutional Relations and Transparency
  - Secretariat for Foreign Action and the European Union. Directorate General for European and Mediterranean Affairs
- European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed)

### Co-organisers

- Government of Catalonia
  - Ministry of Business and Knowledge
    - Secretariat for Universities and Research
    - ACCIÓ. Agency for Business Competitiveness
  - Ministry for Digital Policy and Public Administration
  - Ministry for Foreign Action, Institutional Relations and Transparency
    - Advisory Council for Sustainable Development (CADS)
    - Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation
    - Directorate General for Public Participation and Electoral Processes
  - Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Families
    - Catalan Youth Agency
  - Ministry of Territory and Sustainability
- Barcelona City Council
- DIPLOCAT. Public Diplomacy Council of Catalonia
- Mediterranean Cooperation Alliance (MCA)
  - Adriatic Ionian Euro-Region (AIE)
  - Euro-Region Pyrenees Mediterranean
  - Inter-Mediterranean Commission (IMC) of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPRM)
  - Latin Arch
  - Mediterranean Cities Network (MedCities)

## In partnership with

- Assembly of Citizens of the Mediterranean Foundation (FACM)
- Center for Rural Studies and International Agriculture (CERAI)
- Young Mediterranean Voices Program (YMV) of the Anna Lindh Foundation
- Inter-Mediterranean Commission Youth Council (Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions) (CPMR)
- MedECC Network
- Catalan National Youth Council
- NovAct
- Regional Government of Sousse
- International Civil Service of Catalonia
- Mediterranean Youth Climate Network (MYCN)
- Pompeu Fabra University. Bachelor's degree in Global Studies
- Women's Forum of Rif
- Youth Council of Barcelona

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