

THE EUROMED PARTNERSHIP AS A CATALYST FOR SDGs: ADVANCING VALUE CHAINS, CLIMATE ACTION, DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

10-12 December 2024

Hosted by : The School of Business, The American University in Cairo (AUC)
Cairo, Egypt

CONTEXT

The EU-Med region holds great potential for sustainable development due to its abundant natural resources, prominent role in global trade, and vibrant young population. However, the region faces significant challenges, reflected in its slow progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

At the latest SDG summit, world leaders admitted that the “achievement of the SDGs is in peril”, but renewed their commitments to overcome challenges at national, regional and global levels. The ongoing impact of the Covid-19, conflicts, resource scarcity, climate shocks, and domestic economic and social crises are major factors impeding the progress in many countries.

The South and Eastern Mediterranean Countries (SEMCS) are no exception. Despite steady improvements over the past two decades, their average SDGs score in 2024 stands at 65% with significant variations among countries, ranging from 72.5% (Tunisia- ranking 60th) to 63.9% (Lebanon ranking 110th)¹, indicating a lot of room for improvement². Progress across the 17 Goals is uneven, with each SEMC having between 1 and 3 Goals “On track” (except for Egypt with none), between 6 and 9 Goals “stagnating,” and between 5 and 7 Goals “moderately increasing” (except for Lebanon with only one). All SEMCs have “decreasing Goals expect for Tunisia and Egypt, which have none.

Overall, decent work, economic growth and innovation (SDG 8 and 9), gender equality and social inclusion (SDG 1, 5 and 10), climate action (SDG 13,14 and 15) are among the most challenging goals for the SEMCs.

¹ Sustainable Development report, 2024. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2024.pdf> and <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/rankings>

² On the EU side, the lowest performer scores 78.71% (Greece ranking 29th) and the highest is 83.45% (Germany ranking 4th).



With support of:



While localisation of the SDGs will bring implementation closer to communities and territories³, regional cooperation is essential to overcome stagnation through collaboration and partnerships in various aspects. By leveraging the Euromed partnership, countries in the region can create synergies that not only accelerate progress towards the SDGs but also enhance regional stability and prosperity.

In this context, the Euromed partnership has the potential to rejuvenate SDGs progress⁴ by:

- ⇒ Integrating sustainable value chains to foster trade and investment while enhancing innovation and digital transformation;
- ⇒ Addressing common environmental challenges through climate action and sustainable practices, including agriculture, renewable energy, water and food security, etc.
- ⇒ Supporting social and territorial development by investing in education, training (TVET), skills, healthcare, social protection and inclusion, addressing migration and refugees' issues, creating jobs, and promoting entrepreneurships to reduce inequality;
- ⇒ Empowering Mediterranean youth by creating decent jobs, promoting skills, innovation, and social integration.

As the United Nations discusses the Pact for the Future as an attempt to boost the implementation of the SDGs, and with renewed EU interest in the Mediterranean (announcing a new agenda and an EU commissioner for the Mediterranean), it is crucial to strengthen the ties and synergies between the Euro-Mediterranean partnership and the 2030 Agenda.

CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES

Against this backdrop, the 2024 FEMISE annual conference will bring together policymakers, researchers, private sector representative, international organisations, development agencies, climate change experts, civil society, young entrepreneurs, with the following objectives:

- ⇒ Engage stakeholders in a dialogue on how the Euromed partnership can drive sustainable development and advance SDG progress;
- ⇒ Promote strategies for enhancing sustainable collaboration while prioritizing resilient value chains, climate action, digital transformation, innovation, investing in people and territories, and youth empowerment.
- ⇒ Formulate actionable recommendations for achieving a sustainable and resilient EU-Med partnership with youth at its center.

The 2024 FEMISE annual conference is hosted by the **School of Business at the American University in Cairo (AUC)** and co-organized by the European Institute of the Mediterranean (**IEMed**), with the

³ Localizing [the SDGS] is not the parachuting of global goals into local contexts. It means implementing global agendas in cities and territories to achieve local and global goals. It is a process of harnessing local opportunities, priorities and ideas" (<https://www.learning.uclg.org/localizing-sdgs>), UNDP, POLICY BRIEF: SDG LOCALIZATION IN THE ARAB STATES, 2022- <https://www.undp.org/arab-states/publications/sdg-localization-arab-states>

⁴ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/-/xavier-cadoret-euro-mediterranean-integration-is-crucial-for-the-implementation-of-sdgs>



With support of:



support of the **Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation** ([AECID](#)).

CONFERENCE STRUCTURE

The conference will include four plenary sessions where thought leaders will address the following sub-themes, in addition to the opening and closing sessions. It will also feature four thematic sessions where selected researchers will present their research outputs on these sub-themes.

The conference plenary sessions will be addressing the following issues:

OPENING SESSION

The EU-Med region faces common challenges such as climate change, economic and social inequalities, unemployment, social exclusion, and migration. Addressing these complex issues requires collaboration on shared priorities to find common solutions while advancing progress toward the SDGs.

Key Issues:

- How can the EU-Med region leverage its partnership to accelerate SDG progress?
- What technical and financial support is needed for the SEMCs? Is a more equitable role in global economic governance relevant?
- How can the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD) be fully leveraged to help progress toward the SDGs at regional, sub-regional, national and local levels in the Mediterranean region.

PLENARY SESSION 1

Accelerating Sustainable Value Chain in the EU-Med region through Digital Transformation

Enhancing EU-Med value chains can foster economic integration, build resilience, and promote fair trade practices, contributing to job creation, environmental actions (Green Deal), and regional progress, but challenges still exist⁵. Digital transformation can advance sustainable development⁶ and facilitate regional value chain integration by enhancing innovation, product quality, competitiveness, new technologies, and access to data and information. This will have a positive spill-over effect on the economic, social and environmental aspects across the region.

Key Issues:

- How can the EU and Med countries collaborate to create sustainable value chains that promote economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection?
- What is the current state of digital transformation among SEMCs, and its impact on competitiveness, sustainable value chains and regional integration?
- How can the innovation ecosystem be optimised for EU-Med regional integration and supply

⁵ Please refer to the FEMISE annual conference 2023 plenary session 2 for more details:

<https://www.femise.org/en/articles-en/femise-annual-conference2023-plenary-session-2-report/>

⁶ SDG article on : “Harnessing Digital Transformation to rescue SDGs”, July 2023, <https://sdg-action.org/harnessing-digital-to-rescue-the-sdgs/>



With support of:



chains? What role for private sector and entrepreneurs? How to finance the upgrade of infrastructure and services?

- Is the digital divide affecting the EU-Med integration, sustainable development and SDGs?

PLENARY SESSION 2

Accelerating Climate Action and Environmental Sustainability in the EU-Med region

As the region faces numerous challenges⁷, there is a need to expediate the EU-Med green transition, enhance innovation in renewable energy, water and agriculture to promote sustainable growth, job creation and attainment of SDGs. Some progress has been made in terms of regional cooperation on environmental protection, particularly through initiatives like the Barcelona Convention. However, the pace of action needs to accelerate to meet SDG targets, particularly in renewable energy adoption and sustainable water management. Shifting towards sustainable practices in sectors like agriculture, energy, and manufacturing is crucial for environmental protection and economic resilience in the EU-Med region. This requires regional collaboration on climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies, promoting renewable energy sources, advancing relevant technologies, and implementing sustainable resource management practices.

Key Issues:

- To what extent the Euromed Partnership can help achieving climate goals and environmental sustainability in the region?
- What strategies can accelerate the green transition in the MED region with EU support maximizing the potential of the European Green Deal?
- How can financing mechanisms support sustainable development initiatives in the Med region?
- How to foster a sustainable innovation ecosystem for renewable energy, clean technology, and smart agriculture?
- How can the green transition create new economic opportunities and green jobs?
- How to better engage SMEs in fostering the green and blue economy? What challenges?
- What roles the digital transformation and innovation play in driving climate action and achieving SDGs?
- How can the EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) catalyze energy transition and reduce the carbon footprint of the SMEs?
- How to ensure that the transition is just and fair, leaving no one behind? How can a just transition to green jobs be gendered, recognizing that climate change adversities are not gender neutral?

PLENARY SESSION 3

Fostering Social and Territorial Equalities and Sustainable Development in and across the EU-Med Region

Social and territorial disparities are major challenges in SMEs, reflected in pronounced inequalities in

⁷ Please refer to the FEMISE annual conference 2023 plenary session 3 for more details:

<https://www.femise.org/en/articles-en/femise-annual-conference-2023-plenary-session-3-report/>



With support of:



terms of opportunities and access to resources based on gender, territory and socioeconomic status. Supporting social and territorial development is key to advance sustainable development and strengthen the Euromed partnership. Investing in education, training, healthcare and social protection can expand employment opportunities, reduce unemployment, enhance female labour participation, and decrease inequalities. Addressing migration and refugees' challenges is also becoming a priority.

Key Issues:

- What is blocking the translation of social gains into economic progress in SEMCs despite good progress in education and healthcare?
- What are the main obstacles to gender equality, low female participation, and exclusion in SEMCs? What strategies can overcome them?
- Is social protection adequate in the region? What policies are needed to ensure social cohesion?
- What is the status of territorial disparities in SEMCs? What strategies can promote sustainable territorial development? What role for local governance?
- How can human mobility achieve mutual benefit for the EU-Med region? What is the impact on refugees and host countries?
- How to further promote social entrepreneurship to create more job opportunities and drive innovation in the region?
- How to finance efficient welfare states in the region in the current context? How can regional cooperation help?
- What is and can be the contribution of the Euromed Partnership to reducing social and territorial inequalities in the region?

PLENARY SESSION 4

Empowering Mediterranean Youth: The Catalyst for an Integrated EU-Med Region Achieving SDGs

Despite being a large proportion of the population, Mediterranean youth face many challenges, such as exclusion, unemployment and lack of opportunities, just to name a few⁸. Empowering young people as leaders, innovators, entrepreneurs, and change-makers is essential for a sustainable future. By fostering youth entrepreneurship and equipping them with skills, knowledge, and resources, they can become active participants and leaders in achieving the SDGs.

Key Issues:

- How can regional cooperation better contribute to youth empowerment in the Mediterranean?
- How can education, vocational training, and entrepreneurship programmes empower Med youth to contribute to the SDGs?
- What obstacles hinder the skills-to-jobs matching for youth? How to effectively reduce youth unemployment?
- What innovative strategies can anticipate and address emerging skill needs and help outline a clear

⁸ Please refer to the FEMISE annual conference 2023 plenary session 3 for more details:
<https://www.femise.org/en/conferences-and-seminars/femise-annual-conference2023-plenary-session-4-report/>



With support of:



skills response plan?

- How to enhance the region's innovation strategy to make it relevant and practical for youth?
How to enhance youth creativity and bridge the gap between research and markets?
- What role do digital transformation and technologies, AI, and big data play in fostering youth engagement in innovative and creative entrepreneurship?
- Are young Mediterraneans fairly represented in decision-making processes at local, national, regional, and global levels?
- By harnessing the power of value chains, innovation, digital transformation, green transition, social cohesion, and youth engagement, the Euro-Mediterranean region can achieve a future that is prosperous, sustainable, and equitable for all.



With support of:

