

UfM Youth Agenda Call for Action



Union for the Mediterranean
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Foreword



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The Euro-Mediterranean region finds itself at a pivotal juncture, defined by the vibrant energy of its youthful population and the complex challenges that loom over its promising demographic landscape. With an extraordinary one in three individuals under the age of 25, rising to nearly half in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries, the region is at the forefront of a unique youth-driven narrative, holding the key to our collective destiny.

Yet, within this promising demographic, significant challenges persist— climate change and sustainable development, unemployment, gender inequality, migration, conflicts, or radicalization and violent extremism cast shadows over the potential for a brighter future, creating a complex landscape that demands thoughtful and decisive action.

In response to this critical juncture, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) has embraced a visionary agenda through the adoption of the UfM Youth Strategy 2030 in December 2021. This strategy serves as a guiding beacon, reflecting the collective aspirations of our 43 member states to place young people at the forefront of regional policies.

The UfM Youth Agenda, introduced as a fundamental step towards operationalizing the UfM Youth Strategy 2030, transcends rhetoric to signify a transformative shift towards concrete action. It represents a call to action for the stakeholders in the region to adopt a holistic and integrated approach across all sectors, embedding youth policies and initiatives at the core of their agenda.

The UfM Youth Agenda is the result of a series of consultations on the thematic

priorities of the UfM Youth Strategy. These consultations involved thematic experts, national and regional youth-led organizations, as well as representatives from civil society and National Focal Points on Youth, nominated by UfM Member States.

As a result, this document conveys to decision-makers, civil society organizations and youth-led initiatives a clear signal to move towards a policy-driven mindset that permeates every level of society, guaranteeing in the process, an inter-generational dialogue and inclusiveness at all levels. By engaging youth as active partners rather than passive subjects, the UfM seeks to empower them as architects of their own destinies, while being instrumental in shaping the future of our region.

As we embark on this transformative journey, the UfM envisions success specifically through collaborative efforts, working hand in hand with and for the youth.

The UfM stands resolute in its commitment to be a dependable and unwavering partner, dedicated to empowering the youth of the Euro-Mediterranean region. Its aim is to facilitate the creation of an inclusive and sustainable future for the Mediterranean. This Agenda is more than just a document. It represents a compelling call for action, should serve as a collaborative guide and remains a testament to the UfM readiness to embark on new partnerships for shaping a future where the potential of our youth is made to flourish to the benefit of all.

Acknowledgement

The UfM Co-Presidency, particularly the Ministry of Youth of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) of the European Commission, as well as the UfM National Focal Points on Youth merit primary acknowledgment for their unwavering commitment to youth empowerment that paved the way for this *UfM Youth Agenda: Call for Action*.

The preparatory guidelines for it were established in 2021, as outlined in the UfM Youth Strategy 2030 - Euro-Mediterranean youth towards a common goal.

Furthermore, a series of four online Working Groups on Youth Engagement were conducted throughout 2023, involving various UfM stakeholders, to enrich the expected impact of the UfM Youth Agenda.

All colleagues who worked within the UfM Secretariat in 2023 deserve recognition for their personal contributions in advocating for the Calls for Action embedded in the Agenda.

Mr. Graziano Tullio, Youth Policies Expert, deserves a special mention as key drafter of the Agenda.

The contribution of all UfM partners who participated in the online Working Groups deserves due recognition. These include: African Youth Initiative for Climate Change, ANDI-AGRO, Anna Lindh Foundation, Association of Hungarian PhD and DLA candidates - DOSZ, CIHEAM, Dataphoria, Eco Nubia Ecolodge, EU Interreg NEXT MED, EU JEEL Connect, European Institute of the Mediterranean, European Training

Foundation, Future Energy Leaders, Gaza Urban & Peri-urban Agriculture Platform - CUPAP, Grana Nostra Collective, Hack & Pitch, IMAL Initiative for Climate and Development, Initiatives pour la Communauté Economique du Maghreb, Istituto per la Cooperazione Universitaria, Lebanese University, Lithuanian Youth Council, Madarat Center for Community Development, Mediterranean New Chance Network - MedNC, Mediterranean Youth Council, Mediterranean Youth for Water Network, Mediterranean Youth Foundation, Minassa - INCO Group, National Youth Council - Italian Republic, National Youth Council - Republic of Malta, Nile University, OECD, Oxfam Italia, Petra Patrimonia, Réseau des Villes Euromed, RESMYLE project, and Tunisian Association for Management and Social Stability - TAMSS.

H.E. Ambassador Dr. John Paul Grech, Deputy Secretary General, Social and Civil Affairs, Ms. Anna Dorangricchia, Programme Manager, and Ms. Giulia Dimonopoli, Assistant, have been responsible for revising the Agenda.



Introduction

In a world marked by pressing environmental and societal challenges, young people are emerging as the driving force behind innovative solutions and transformative actions. Their involvement is crucial to achieving sustainable development goals and fostering positive change (UNESCO, 2020).

Yet, despite their incredible potential, young individuals often face significant barriers on their path to making an impact:

In a region where, on the southern shores of the Mediterranean, 50% of the population is below the age of 24, young people remain overwhelmingly excluded from actively participating in policy formulation and decision-making. Additionally, young people struggle to create social impact on the ground due to the absence of support mechanisms that would help them engage through volunteering and other forms of social association.

In 17 MENA countries, less than 50% of 18–24-year-olds believe that their public administration is implementing effective policies to address their most pressing concerns. (OECD, 2022)

Furthermore, youth are underrepresented in public policy and state institutions, as in the MENA region, individuals under the age of 40 represent only 16% of parliamentary members. (Ibid.)

Specifically, youth from disadvantaged and rural backgrounds face significant obstacles in terms of representations,

access to opportunities and facilities. These socio-political challenges reflect economic ones: according to the World Bank, youth unemployment rates in the MENA region are alarmingly high, ranging from 30% to 40% in some countries. Additionally, there are 21 million NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) in the MENA region, accounting for one-third of the youth population.

Beyond the institutional realm, young women in the MENA region face a dual challenge as they continue to encounter gender-based barriers associated with their youth. Despite some improvements in literacy and tertiary education rates, legal frameworks, policies, and traditional social norms prevent them from enjoying the same opportunities as young men. Gender disparities are evident: while unemployment rates for young men stand at 22.8%, for young women, they stand at 40.50% in the same age group in the MENA region.

The Mediterranean region also has one of the fastest urbanization rates in the world, accounting for 60% of the Mediterranean population living in urban areas. This figure is expected to increase, which will have a consequent negative impact on the region's vulnerability to climate change and environmental challenges. Such vulnerability is compounded by the fact that the Mediterranean region is warming 20% faster than the global average.

All the data show that Civil Society and Business Support Organizations can

play a significant role to respond to the multi-layered challenges of the region. Youth entrepreneurship presents a huge opportunity to transform young people from job seekers to job creators. Youth entrepreneurship is strongly linked to the emerging market of green jobs, which contribute to the preservation, restoration, or improvement of the environment (ILO, 2022). On the other hand, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) can support youth engagement in policy-making processes as well as in volunteering, thereby helping to address the root causes of marginalization.

Following the path marked by the UfM Youth Strategy and aligning with other international milestones for youth empowerment (such as, inter alia, the EU Youth Strategy; EU Youth Action Plan in External Action; the Plaidoyer Méditerranée 2030; UN Stockholm +50), the UfM Youth Agenda serves as a guiding document to harness the boundless potential of young people across the Euro-Mediterranean region in tackling the multifaceted issues of our time.

By adopting youth engagement via a transversal approach, **the UfM Youth Agenda displays a comprehensive set of initiatives and proposes recommendations aimed at reinforcing the role of youth in developing the MENA region, while combating major global challenges.** Its aim is to ensure that youth are not just stand-by subjects to policies, but active actors in their implementation.

The UfM Agenda goes a step further by advocating for increased visibility and

legitimacy of youth-led organizations, providing fertile ground for their mentoring and financial support. In this way, the UfM seeks to create a more conducive environment for the development of knowledge-sharing platforms, networking events, and strategic partnerships among youth-led CSOs and other relevant stakeholders in the Mediterranean region.

Paving the way for a more structured, self-sustainable and action-oriented roadmap, the UfM Youth Agenda is a call for actions and a blueprint for collaboration. National programmes and regional initiatives should converge within the UfM Youth Agenda by mobilizing existing resources and improving accessibility to different infrastructures (facilities, technology, etc.) based on identified contextual needs.

The Agenda sets the ground for the full recognition of the transformative power of young individuals following the working methodology of the UfM, based on the synergies among the three Ps (Project, Platforms, and Policies), bearing in mind the other three Ps - People, Partnerships and Planet - of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

This three Ps approach is reflected also in the architecture of the Youth Agenda: it is in fact structured around **three thematic pillars and twelve calls to actions** that aim to empower, engage and enable youth to play a pivotal role in shaping a more sustainable, inclusive and prosperous future for all.

Development and Structure

Given the wide range of topics covered in the UfM Youth Strategy 2030 and the diverse perspectives and practices gathered through the UfM Working Groups on Youth Engagement, the development of the UfM Youth Agenda initiated with a focused process aimed at identifying a more limited set of priority areas.

These areas were chosen based on the following criteria: i) unanimous support from all Working Group members, ii) relevance in supporting Member States' policies, and iii) alignment with the broader UfM agenda.

As a result of this exercise, three overarching areas of convergence emerged:

- Environment and climate action;
- Education and employment;
- Social inclusion and participation.

A subsequent clustering process was conducted, grouping and refining the most significant proposals from the Working Groups into twelve (12) key actions, with four (4) actions allocated to each of the above macro-areas.

These proposed actions were evaluated thoroughly, considering, in so doing, not only their relevance and potential impact, but also their sustainability within the broader institutional framework within which they are to be implemented. Additionally, their potential in promoting synergies with other UfM programmes and initiatives carried out in different frameworks and at different levels, as well as their compatibility with strategies put

forward by other intergovernmental organisations such as the UN, EU, CoE, AU, and others, were assessed.

It is worth noting that the time that has elapsed between the formulation of the Youth Strategy (2019-2020) and the launch of the Youth Agenda in 2023, has inevitably influenced the prioritisation, terminology and the relevance of the actions initially proposed in the Strategy. Therefore, the Youth Agenda takes into account the on-going developments within the youth sector that have emerged in the light of recent global challenges. Its creation was a dynamic process, assessing previous proposals, identifying new priorities while also considering future perspectives.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that the Youth Agenda does not provide an exhaustive analysis of the situation faced by the youth sector. Rather, it reflects the extent of the expertise contributed, the concerns raised, the recommendations received as well as the good practices gathered through the extensive consultation process which involved the UfM National Focal Points on Youth and Working Groups.

Format and Application

The UfM Youth Agenda is unique in nature, featuring a flexible structure and a broad rationale. **It was developed after finding a middle ground between a policy proposal and an action plan, with the final aim being that of guiding the common effort towards operationalizing the UfM Youth Strategy 2030.** This is due to the specific programmatic framework in which youth policy is situated within the UfM architecture, where strategic convergence, operational mechanisms,

and financial allocation at the three levels of the UfM structure, are still in the early stages of development.

The UfM Youth Agenda is conceived as both a “call for action” for all entities operating within the UfM architecture (aiming to expand the role of the youth sector within the UfM ecosystem) **and as an “advocacy paper”** with the goal of mobilising additional resources and generating greater political interest in youth-related matters within UfM governance.

As a result of this rationale, rather than adhering to the traditional three-tier structure (Secretariat, Member States, and regional level), the intention for this Agenda is to encompass the entire multi-level governance structure of the organisation.

The UfM Secretariat, Member States, and other regional entities should view the Youth Agenda as a guiding document whenever they undertake programmes and initiatives related to youth, in line with their mandates and available resources. Therefore, all stakeholders involved in these efforts can find in the Youth Agenda to serve as a source of inspiration for their activities and a basis for collaboration, thus enhancing their programmes and initiatives collectively.

In this regard, the Agenda aims to instil a policy-driven mindset throughout all levels of the organisation when addressing youth-related issues. This represents a shift from a solely political approach to a more programmatic one.

In conclusion, the Youth Agenda was designed as:

- **A dynamic document that remains open to additional inputs** from young people and youth entities, both of whom are constantly experimenting new methodologies and initiatives;
- **A flexible resource adaptable** to local and national contexts;
- **A compass guiding the convergence among Member States and other entities at a regional level.**

In the main, the Youth Agenda remains a flexible and forward-looking tool, capable of accommodating insights and proposals from various stakeholders as they emerge during the operational phase.

What may initially appear as a potential drawback of this approach should be considered as a strength. **It enables a more comprehensive, inclusive and dynamic participation process in the development of the youth sector of the UfM.**

The UfM will further act on both targeting selected constituencies for the key proposed initiatives and on streamlining the needs of youth into other UfM activities, such as the 2024 Youth Forum on Employment and under the umbrella of the activities foreseen by the future Med Capitals of Culture.



Environment and Climate Action

1

GRANT SCHEME FOR YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

While national governments and international institutions bear the primary responsibility for addressing climate change, young social entrepreneurs and youth movements play a crucial role in this context: many of the most innovative ideas for combating climate change originate from young individuals. Therefore, it is pivotal **to provide support to both young social entrepreneurs and youth activists in transforming their ideas into tangible projects.**

While there are existing financial grant schemes for young people involved in climate and environmental initiatives, many of them present several shortcomings: i) grant applications often demand advanced project development skills and a deep understanding of complex international donor rules; ii) restrictive eligibility criteria and financial rules can be significant obstacles for accessing these funds; iii) grant schemes rarely include mentoring mechanisms, which are essential for young beneficiaries to refine their ideas and establish sustainable paths for their projects beyond the grant period.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to establish streamlined funding avenues specifically designed to support youth-led initiatives. Such an effort can also contribute to creating a **more conducive environment for the development of Very Small Businesses (VSBs)** and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) operating in the sustainable development sector.

Call for action: Establish a simplified grant scheme addressing environmental challenges while serving as tool for youth empowerment.

Recommendations:

- Sustain initiatives that strengthen the role of youth in fighting desertification and deforestation, promoting sustainable food systems, managing water resources, restoring ecosystems and providing nature-based solutions;
- Encourage the establishment and development of Very Small Businesses (VSBs) and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to operationalise these projects;
- Establish a mentoring process and build a Community of Practice where young entrepreneurs and youth activists can connect and share their experiences;
- Foster synergies with international organisations working in the field to facilitate knowledge exchange and transfer;
- Ensure high visibility for the young beneficiaries of the fund to enhance public recognition of youth-led entities advocating for climate action.

Expected outcome: Boosted enabling conditions for impactful youth-led climate actions.

2

ENGAGING YOUTH IN THE UFM GREENERMED AGENDA

The UfM Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Climate Action (October 2021) is an ambitious commitment to accelerate the transition towards sustainable, climate-neutral, and green economies. To operationalise this Ministerial Declaration, the UfM has adopted the 2030 GreenerMed Agenda which aims to advance a systemic policy approach, promoting cooperation in the sector. As part of the implementation of the UfM 2030 GreenerMed Agenda, a total of 187 regional and multi-country programmes & projects has been assessed in 2023.

The GreenerMed agenda reflects concerns for future generations. To this end, it is crucial to actively involve young people to ensure its successful implementation. Thus, additional efforts should be made to engage youth, including young women, in enhancing the impact of the GreenerMed Agenda.

Call for action: Implement a series of initiatives to mainstream the GreenerMed Agenda among young people and actively involve young generations in its projects.

Recommendations:

- Involve youth entities, researchers, and young leaders in the activities, conferences, and other policy-oriented initiatives organised in the framework of the GreenerMed Agenda;
- Ensure that the monitoring mechanism of the GreenerMed

Agenda includes youth groups (by establishing mechanisms for identifying these groups, ensuring their financial sustainability, and safeguarding their independence);

- Create a GreenerMed narrative tailored for youth, by conducting an awareness-raising campaign from a youth perspective (i.e.: informative materials produced by young people).
- Promote a wide range of complementary youth local initiatives on environmental education to encourage more sustainable lifestyles. These initiatives should be carried out through a strong collaboration between higher education institutions and the youth non-formal education sector which makes use of an interactive methodology (i.e.: workshops in high schools, seminars at universities in collaboration with youth-led NGOs, events in youth clubs, and community-based awareness initiatives with the contribution of researchers and academia etc.

Expected outcome: Heightened youth engagement around the GreenerMed Agenda and increased youth awareness of its programmes.



3

GREEN SKILLS TRAINING FOR YOUTH

To effectively address significant climate challenges (such as food security, desertification and biodiversity degradation), it is crucial to establish a comprehensive strategy. This strategy should involve governments, the private sector and civil society organisations (including youth groups and young entrepreneurs). They should work together, carrying out complementary and mutually reinforcing actions.

In the context of the multilevel governance strategy for a new Green Deal in the Mediterranean, **young professionals need to continuously update their knowledge and competencies related to green skills.** However, merely having advanced academic training does not necessarily guarantee recognition of their potential to drive the green transition. Often, the scientific and policymaking sectors focusing on environmental issues are dominated by older elites who may not fully **acknowledge the insights and concerns of younger generations of researchers and entrepreneurs.**

To bridge this generational gap and encourage innovative solutions, comprehensive up-skilling programmes for young professionals must be established. These programmes, in conjunction with the commitment of the scientific and policymaking sectors to actively engage with young researchers and entrepreneurs, will contribute to more effectively tackling climate challenges.

Call for action: Establish an up-skilling technical training programme for young professionals.

Recommendations:

- Focus the training programmes on aspects targeting REEE (Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency) solutions;
- Include modules on digital literacy in areas such as data analytics, IoT (Internet of Things), and blockchain, which have applications in environmental monitoring and sustainability;
- Target especially young women, recognising their potential as drivers of change in achieving an inclusive green transition;
- Facilitate the participation of young professionals in existing scientific initiatives, for example, by sponsoring the participation of young researchers in regional/global networks like the Mediterranean Experts on Climate and Environmental Change and ensuring a permanent seat for a youth representative at the UfM Water Expert Group.

Expected outcome: Young professionals trained and skilled to benefit from as well as to drive the green transition.

4

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN WATER- RELATED ISSUES

A 2017 report by the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimated that over 2 billion people worldwide lack access to safely managed drinking water services. Southern Mediterranean countries, in particular, face significant challenges related to the **unequal distribution of water as well as water insecurity.** Water scarcity exacerbates issues such as poverty, declining health, unemployment, and mass displacement, leading to the emergence of large refugee populations.

In this context, and in light of **the intersection of water challenges and vulnerabilities affecting youth** (children malnutrition, school absenteeism due to lack of sanitation facilities etc.), young people are at the forefront of water-related activism. Youth networks and young environmental movements are actively engaged in campaigns to raise awareness about the Water, Energy, Food, and Ecosystems (WEFE) Nexus, as well as the Water, Employment, and Migration (WEM) Nexus. These challenges have been highlighted in the **2023 UfM Youth Water Strategy.**

Their advocacy efforts, practical initiatives and innovative ideas need to be acknowledged, shared, and replicated to create a more secure regional water future. To achieve this, the development of an online platform can serve as a valuable tool for **facilitating the strategic convergence around water related issues,** identifying key challenges in the Mediterranean

region, and accelerating the formulation of joint actions.

Call for action: Develop an online platform for water related issues.

Recommendations:

- Conceptualize the platform as a networking hub, fostering a collective sense of awareness and engagement on water-related issues;
- Promote a knowledge-sharing approach that enables young activists and entrepreneurs to enhance their skills through peer-to-peer interactions;
- Explore the platform's potential for identifying opportunities for collaboration and joint projects in the regional water sector;
- Utilise the platform to promote youth entrepreneurship related to water and showcase job opportunities in the water sector for young professionals;
- Encourage inter-generational learning through online workshops and debates on contemporary water issues, involving a diverse range of academic, governmental and private organisations.

Expected outcome: Youth engaged to foster awareness, networking and knowledge sharing via digital platforms.



Education and Employment

1

SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

The global economy is undergoing significant changes due to digitalisation and the green transition. These transformations are highlighting a growing gap between the skills that young people acquire through education and training and the skills demanded by the labour market. **To increase youth employment and cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset among young people**, it is essential to invest in the development of soft skills.

Entrepreneurial skills encompass more than the technical competencies required to establish and manage a business. They also include problem-solving, public speaking, empathy, leadership, teamwork, and other soft skills that are valuable for navigating within the broader socio-economic environment. In a job market that is continuously evolving and where technical knowledge can quickly become obsolete, soft skills become a valuable asset for any young professional, contributing to their long-term career success and advancement.

Call for action: Support training and capacity building initiatives that focus on developing soft skills.

Recommendations:

- Focus on skills that are often underexplored within the formal

- educational system (such as group facilitation, active listening, emotional intelligence, nonviolent communication, and team building);
- Utilise non-formal education methodologies to enhance skill development;
- Collaborate closely with youth workers and youth-led organisations, recognising their expertise in developing soft skills and engaging with young people;
- Invest in the online component of training offerings to provide opportunities for young individuals in rural areas or those facing mobility challenges;
- Target young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) to enhance their employability;
- Pay special attention to involving young women to address the gender disparities in the labour market.

Expected outcome: Youth equipped with essential time-proof soft skills to bridge the skills gap and boost their employability.

2

SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY (SSE) INITIATIVES

The Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) plays a significant role in **promoting civic engagement and introducing young people to social economy entrepreneurship**, enhancing their skills and knowledge related to the socio-political aspects of the economy.

Building on their value-driven and human-centred approaches, SSE initiatives strive for social justice and **promote rural development**, creating better social conditions and greater economic prospects at the local level. For these reasons, SSE is now considered an essential tool for localising the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Call for action: Engage young people in SSE's initiatives.

Recommendations:

- Promote awareness and education initiatives about SSE principles and opportunities among young people;
- Elaborate accessible financing options (crowd-funding platforms, microfinance options, ect.) for youth-led SSE projects;
- Advocate for favourable SSE policies and simplified registration processes to make it more accessible to young people;
- Establish SSE specific incubators and accelerators that offer mentorship,

- workspace, and resources to young SSE startups;
- Organise SSE hackathons to encourage young people to develop and test their innovative ideas.

Expected outcome: A more inclusive economic growth model that increases the attractiveness of rural areas for youth, young entrepreneurs and investors.



3

YOUTH MOBILITY AND INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMES

Youth mobility programmes are vital for **personal and professional development**. Field experience, direct contact with local realities, and exchanges with peers from abroad are also key drivers for cultural integration, in an era where most of the current issues - such as the rise of populism - are largely the result of biased perceptions of the other. Youth mobility plays in fact a significant role in promoting intercultural dialogue and in **addressing the root causes of violent extremism** by bridging potential social and cultural divides through educational, professional, and artistic exchange.

However, accessing international mobility programmes remains a challenge for young people and university students from the Southern Mediterranean. This is particularly true for young individuals from **rural areas who face additional barriers**. In many countries, resources and information remain highly concentrated in the capital cities and major urban centres.

Call for action: Strengthen national, regional and international youth mobility programmes.

Recommendations:

- International Organisations, Sub-Regional Organisations and Development Agencies shall substantially incorporate youth mobility into their programmes related to education, skills development, and youth employment.

- Ministries of education, labour, and youth affairs (along with related agencies) should prioritise and actively promote youth mobility in their core programmatic agendas. They shall establish synergies with national and international youth mobility agencies to enhance regional integration in Youth Exchange Programs and utilise youth mobility as means of fostering inter-regional cooperation.
- Educational Institutions shall increase their offer of international internships and grant more substantial scholarships, especially to vulnerable people.
- Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Youth Associations shall provide support and assistance to participants (especially the ones belonging to vulnerable populations and people with disabilities) before, during and after their mobility experiences. They can also play a significant role in mapping exchange programmes, highlighting good practices and sharing success stories.
- All entities involved in youth mobility programmes, at any level, shall increase their capacity to address and involve rural youth to ensure that everyone has equal access to opportunities.

Expected outcome: More young people enabled to benefit from mobility programmes ensuring equal access to opportunities for all.

4

PROMOTING VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering is a cornerstone of education and employment policies, bridging the gap between theoretical learning and practical application. Through volunteering, young people can develop essential skills, gain valuable work experience and build a network of contacts.

Volunteering is also a key element in building more dynamic and cohesive societies as it encourages community engagement, **builds social capital and promotes social responsibility**. This is particularly relevant in rural areas where volunteering community projects reduce the negative impact of rural displacement and mitigate the lack of services and resources.

Hence, by building youth's capacities and increasing their sense of belonging to their communities, volunteering enhances young people's **potential for socio-economic stability**.

However, the current level of youth volunteering remains low.

Call for action: Support the establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean Youth Volunteering Prize.

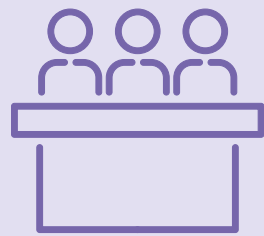
Recommendations:

- The prize should reward in particular initiatives which:
 - i) contribute to the expansion of digital services in rural areas;
 - ii) offer cultural activities in remote communities;

- iii) contribute to the development of community environmental action plans;
- iv) involve disadvantaged young people from vulnerable backgrounds;
- v) promote dialogue and create bridges between local, regional and international levels.

- The prize shall also serve to create a positive narrative around the younger generations, shifting them from being traditionally seen as beneficiaries to central actors of global change.

Expected outcome: Youth-led volunteer-based initiatives, emphasising the value of community projects promoted and supported.



Social Inclusion and Participation

1

YOUTH POLICY DIALOGUES

Young people should not be passive subjects of policies, but rather become active actors in their implementation. However, there is a clear **lack of representation of young people in policy-making processes**. Strengthening youth participation means increasing their involvement in decision-making mechanisms and integrating them into both the policy conception and evaluation process of policies.

On the other hand, the issues that concern the younger generation most - such as environmental challenges and energy policies, gender issues and intersectionality, decent jobs, and inclusive growth - require a cross-sectorial and inter-generational approach, based on co-leadership that goes beyond traditional forms of policymaking.

It is therefore necessary to establish a more **structured, long-term framework for dialogue, one that builds more trustful relationships** between young people and public institutions. Meaningful youth involvement in policy development processes should start by ensuring clear, accessible and safe channels of communication.

Call for action: Establish a regional youth policy dialogue framework.

Recommendations:

- Organise regular “**regional youth policy dialogue**” initiatives where young people and leaders of youth-led organisations can engage with institutional representatives, and discuss specific issues;
- Ensure that these initiatives include the active participation of young women and men from vulnerable backgrounds;
- The **UfM National Focal Points Network on Youth** set-up in 2022 shall be closely connected to the “regional youth policy dialogue” initiatives: the network shall assist in the elaboration and preparation of the dialogue initiatives. Likewise, it shall analyse the outcomes, consolidate the recommendations and transmit the results to the UfM Secretariat and Members States;
- Moreover, regional policy dialogue initiatives shall generate a spill-over effect that will inspire follow-up initiatives at the local level.

Expected outcome: Enhanced youth engagement in policy conception, implementation and evaluation, through more accessible and structured participation mechanisms.

2

EMPOWERING YOUTH FOR POLICY ENGAGEMENT

Youth participation in public policies and democratic initiatives takes on various levels of youth involvement in decision-making processes: informing, consulting, collaborating and empowering. The last level - empowerment - remains pivotal in retaining the engagement of young people and ensuring their long-term commitment.

To achieve youth-responsive policy making and programming, it is imperative to equip young people with the necessary skills and knowledge before involving them in policy dialogues. This approach goes beyond merely tokenizing youth or involving them in discussions due to their age. Instead, it ensures that their participation is meaningful and that their valuable contributions are acknowledged.

Investing in political literacy enables young people to comprehend the political and administrative machinery, **promoting public transparency and, as a result, accountability**. At the same time, it helps them **grasp the interconnectedness of global issues** (including poverty and climate change). Such global awareness is **essential for addressing the SDGs**, which have cross-border implications. Therefore, investing in political education is also an investment in realising the SDGs.

Call for action: Strengthen young people’s competencies prior

to their involvement in policy dialogues and policy-making processes.

Recommendations:

- Offer trainings and workshops on democratic participation, advocacy, policy analysis and decision-making processes;
- Organize confidence building meetings with decision-makers where institutional representatives can provide young people with basic information about regulation, laws and the democratic processes in place in their country;
- Promote local informative campaigns to increase young people’s civic and political awareness related to the SDGs;
- Strengthen citizenship education programmes in schools, shifting from theoretical discussions in classrooms to practical student participation in school governance (i.e.: student councils, community service, volunteering activities).

Expected outcome: Increased political literacy of young people in order to engage them in democratic mechanisms of decision-making process for the achievement of the SDGs.



3

YOUTH CENTRES AND YOUTH WORK

Youth centres and clubs bring together young people from different backgrounds in safe and supervised environments where they can socialize and engage in constructive activities. These venues frequently organize events that allow youth to express themselves, display their talents and celebrate their cultural heritage. Hence, **youth centres and clubs serve as vital hubs for building more cohesive communities and promoting social inclusion.**

Furthermore, in areas where security concerns are prevalent, youth centres and clubs offer an alternative to potentially risky environments. In regions affected by conflict and political instability, these spaces can serve as platforms for dialogue and reconciliation, promoting tolerance and understanding. Hence, **youth work carried out in these venues serves as a preventive measure against radicalization:** it provides positive alternatives, a sense of belonging and opportunities for civic engagement.

While youth centres and clubs are widespread across Europe and the MENA region, to maximize their impact, it is crucial to professionalize those youth workers who offer their services in these spaces.

Call for action: Sustain the professionalization of youth workers.

Recommendations:

- Develop certified training schemes that offer a solid foundation in youth

- work theory, practice, and ethics;
- Ensure youth workers' continuous professional development by ensuring access to workshops, seminars, and courses on topics such as counselling, conflict resolution, and leadership;
- Encourage mentoring processes, where experienced youth workers guide newcomers in the field. This mentorship can help transfer best practices, identify challenges and bridge the knowledge gap caused by high turnover in the sector;
- Support research and evaluation efforts in youth work to develop a data-driven approach for improving the quality and effectiveness of youth work programmes;
- Raise public awareness about the value and impact of youth work;
- Promote the inclusion of youth workers in policy discussions related to youth development, education, and social services.

Expected outcome: A skilled and ethical youth workforce capable of enhancing the value of youth centres for the development of the society.

4

INTERNATIONAL YOUTH NETWORKS

Regional and international youth networks serve as platforms that bring together young people from various backgrounds through their member organisations. They act as bridge between local and international levels, **fostering cooperation in the youth sector and facilitating the exchange of ideas and practices.**

The unique structure of international youth networks ensures the representation of diverse groups of young people from different countries and enhances youth participation by also **channeling the voice of those groups that usually have limited opportunities to contribute to the public debate.**

These youth-led structures are in fact often involved in advocacy efforts where young people play an active role in shaping their own future. By combining resources and knowledge from various sources and locations, they usually have a better chance of influencing policies and programmes.

However, several challenges hinder the full potential of these networks, including political instability, restrictions on civic engagement, limited resources and a lack of skills among young people.

To overcome these obstacles, substantial support is necessary. This support should enable youth networks to carry out meaningful initiatives, offer capacity-building programs for their member organisations and inspire enthusiasm among young people.

Call for action: Provide adequate support for the establishment and

functioning of international and regional youth networks.

Recommendations:

- Promote partnership and networking mechanisms among local and regional networks to enhance regional cooperation while strengthening capacities at the local level;
- Engage in structured dialogue processes with international youth networks during youth events to consolidate youth policies;
- Elaborate funding mechanisms to sustain their annual programme of activities and advocacy actions.

Expected outcome: Empowered international and regional youth networks contributing to a more inclusive global governance.



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