



Youth Engagement for a Sustainable and Inclusive Mediterranean, held in Barcelona in November 2023 (Union for the Mediterranean).

# Empowering Mediterranean Youth: A Deep Dive into the Third Edition of the Mediterranean Youth Academy and the UfM Youth Agenda

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Nestled within the captivating diversity of the Mediterranean region, the third edition of the Mediterranean Youth Academy (MYA) emerged as a dynamic force for change. Co-organized by the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the Mediterranean Youth Foundation (MYF), with steadfast support from the German Cooperation for Development (GIZ), this transformative event unfolded from November 6th to 9th, 2023 in Barcelona, Spain. Collaborating with prestigious partners like the Anna Lindh Foundation, the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), IOM Spain, Casa Mediterráneo, and the Egyptian Ministry of Youth and Sports, the MYA became a melting pot of ideas and aspirations.

## Cultivating Change: A Youthful Perspective

The initiative responded to the wide-felt need for further stages that give voice to the young people of the Mediterranean region. On the one hand, the Mediterranean region, steeped in history and cultural richness, grapples with contemporary challenges. On the other, nearly one third of the population in Euro-Mediterranean countries is under the age of 24, escalating to nearly half in Southern and Eastern Mediterranean nations. The potential of these young minds to contribute to societal solutions is immense,

yet they face multifaceted challenges. From environmental crises to high unemployment rates, limited quality education, inadequate political representation, and gender inequality, the journey for Mediterranean youth is fraught with obstacles.

## The MYA Journey: Nurturing Potential

In response to these challenges, the MYA sought to empower the youth through education, dialogue, and collaborative initiatives. One hundred participants, aged

18-30, from 20 Mediterranean countries, gathered to explore non-formal education workshops and panels. MYA participants had the chance to engage in non-formal education workshops and panels focusing on three specific Thematic Clusters: Youth Employment, Social Inclusion, and Climate Change. Furthermore, the young participants attended sessions on Project Development and engaged in some side activities such as the MYA participants' presentation session and the A Sea of Words Awards Ceremony, organized by the IEMed and the Anna Lindh Foundation and held on November 8th, 2023 in Barcelona, Spain.

### **MYA Thematic Clusters: Unleashing Potential**

MYA participants were selected through a competitive Call for Applications and assigned to one of the three MYA Thematic Clusters according to their background and experience. Each of the three MYA clusters explored a series of sub-topics. Participants were encouraged to work together towards identifying the main challenges related to each topic directly affecting young people of the Euro-Mediterranean region. At the same time, trainers facilitated MYA participants in coming up with recommendations to address decision-makers and relevant stakeholders in the region in order to ensure that young voices are heard, and young people are empowered as active changemakers.

The Youth Employment Thematic Cluster dissected the pressing issue of unemployment in the Euro-Mediterranean region and how it specifically concerns the young generations, even the ones with a high

level of education. This cluster encompassed three components, namely: (i) Employment services and labor market policies: "From learning to earning"; (ii) Entrepreneurship and self-employment; and (iii) Vocational education and training (VET): "Mediterranean Experiences". Participants reflected on strategies to create decent job opportunities and foster an inclusive job market. Recommendations emphasized the need for active youth involvement in policy creation. Policy-makers were urged to tailor solutions resonating with the specific needs of young people.

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Digital skills emerged as a linchpin, ensuring adaptability to evolving job roles and technological advancements. Inclusive rules and policies for youth employment, especially for migrants, were also discussed. Stricter anti-discrimination policies in the workplace were recommended to ensure fair treatment, irrespective of ethnicity, nationality, or migrant status. Inclusivity was analyzed as a transversal topic in each of the three MYA Thematic Clusters. However, a specific series of workshops tackled challenges and opportunities related to inclusion in the Euro-Mediterranean region. In particular, the workshops that were part of the Social Inclusion Thematic Cluster aimed to raise awareness about the role of youth in achieving inclusive societies. Workshops specifically addressed youth and gender-based discrimination, citizen participation in policy-making, and strategies for

the inclusion of youth with limited access to opportunities. Participants formulated recommendations that spanned from promoting active policies to address the gender glass ceiling to encouraging shared parental responsibilities, as well as ensuring equal financial resources for both young men and women, and adopt an intersectional approach in policy-making, recognizing the interrelation between different axes of discrimination such as race, gender, class, sexuality and disability, among others. Citizen participation was elevated to a core principle, urging the creation of inclusive spaces for interaction between policy-makers and citizens. Recommendations from MYA participants also call for challenging stereotypes, incorporating diverse perspectives into school textbooks, and using existing data to counter misinformation about vulnerable groups, such as migrants. The participants also discussed strategies to integrate youth with limited access to opportunities into social life, preventing their exclusion from decision-making processes. Recommendations in this sense urged the promotion of paid internship practices, ensuring equal access to opportunities for professional growth.

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The pressing climate and environmental challenges faced in the Euro-Mediterranean region were at the core of the Climate Change Thematic Cluster. The workshops featured in this cluster specifically focused on the Green Economy and sustainable

businesses, adaptation to climate change, and the natural environment and heritage protection. Recommendations by young MYA participants highlighted the need to increase collaboration among various stakeholders, including the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), while recognizing that environmental conflicts are intricate, interconnected, and multidimensional in nature. To do so, it is pivotal to establish mechanisms to identify reliable partners who are genuinely committed to implementing solutions. Furthermore, climate-related initiatives must leverage on local opportunities and resources acknowledging that not all approaches are uniformly beneficial or detrimental and that it is fundamental to consult and actively engage local communities. Moreover, the shift towards sustainable consumption and production practices stood out as a key paradigm.

### **Amplifying Youth Voices: A Sea of Words Awards Ceremony and the MYA Participants' Presentations Session**

The third edition of the MYA was also a precious opportunity for young participants to connect with their peers and take the lead in sharing initiatives and experiences of the A Sea of Words Contest Awards 2023, held on November 8th, 2023 in Barcelona, Spain. A Sea of Words is an initiative by the IEMed and the Anna Lindh Foundation that celebrated its 16th edition in 2023. It consists of a literary program aimed to amplify the voices of young people in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The 2023 edition focused on Artificial In-

telligence and Youth: Ethical Commitment and Critical Thinking. MYA participants had the chance to attend the ceremony and interact with other committed young people from the region. Additionally, as a complement to the workshops related to the three thematic clusters, young MYA participants were able to present and pitch their own relevant initiatives, start-ups, and projects to their colleagues.

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### **Culmination and Continuation: The 2023 UfM Youth Event and the UfM Youth Agenda**

The MYA reached its pinnacle with the 2023 UfM Youth Event: Youth Engagement for a Sustainable and Inclusive Mediterranean, held on November 9th, 2023. Decision-makers, engaged youth, civil society organizations (CSOs), and international bodies converged to deliberate on empowering young people to lead the green transition, positioning youth as active shapers of Euro-Mediterranean society, and bridging the skill gap towards youth employability and entrepreneurship. During the event, participants endorsed the UfM Youth Agenda: Call for Action, a set of proposals and recommendations for governments, international and regional organizations, and youth groups to reinforce the role of young people tackling major global challenges.

Stemming from the adoption of the UfM Youth Strategy 2030 two years ago, the UfM Youth Agenda is structured around three priority areas which align with the thematic clusters of the third edition of the MYA: (i) Environment and Climate Action; (ii) Education and Employment; and (iii) Social Inclusion and Participation. The Agenda also includes 12 calls to action related to the three priority areas. These steps include items such as establishing a grant scheme to address environmental challenges, supporting soft skill training programs, or creating a regional youth policy dialogue framework. The document also serves as an advocacy paper that urges national programs and regional initiatives to converge within its framework, mobilizing existing resources based on identified contextual needs.

### **In Conclusion: Nurturing a Visionary Generation**

The MYA and the subsequent UfM Youth Event stand as testaments to the UfM commitment to nurturing a generation capable of steering the Mediterranean region towards a more sustainable and inclusive future. The collaborative efforts of the youth, supported by influential stakeholders, have the potential to create a lasting impact, transcending borders, and shaping a brighter tomorrow for the entire Mediterranean community. As these initiatives continue to unfold, they illuminate the path towards a future where the voices of the youth echo in the corridors of decision-making, fostering positive change and sustainable development in the Mediterranean basin and beyond.

## About the UfM

The Union for the Mediterranean is an intergovernmental organization which brings together all the 27 countries of the European Union and 15 countries of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean. The UfM's mission is to enhance regional cooperation, dialogue and the implementation of projects and initiatives with a tangible impact on Euro-Mediterranean citizens, with an emphasis on young people and women. To achieve these objectives, the UfM adopts an action-driven methodology that has three components: political fora, dialogue platforms, and regional projects. Following the UfM mandate and adopted methodology, the UfM strategies

are implemented at three levels: the UfM Secretariat level, the member states' level, and the regional level. The three levels allow pursuit of the regional common ambition of creating effective links between the policy dimension and its operational translation into concrete projects and initiatives on the ground to adequately address the challenges of the region.

Empowering young people as catalysts for positive change is a core priority for the UfM that is advanced through various initiatives, including the adoption of the UfM Youth Strategy 2030 in 2021. As part of this strategy, the UfM supports impactful youth-led projects in the region, such as the third edition of the MYA.