21 June 2021

Concept Note

A proposal on the implementation of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) priorities for strengthening Research and Innovation collaboration towards 2030

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Introduction

This document draws **a proposal on the implementation modalities** of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) research priorities[1] along the Roadmaps/TCIPs developed by the Expert Group of the UfM Regional Platform on Research and Innovation (R&I), to be presented and discussed at the 27th meeting of the UfM Regional Platform on R&I, to be held virtually on 7th of July 2021.
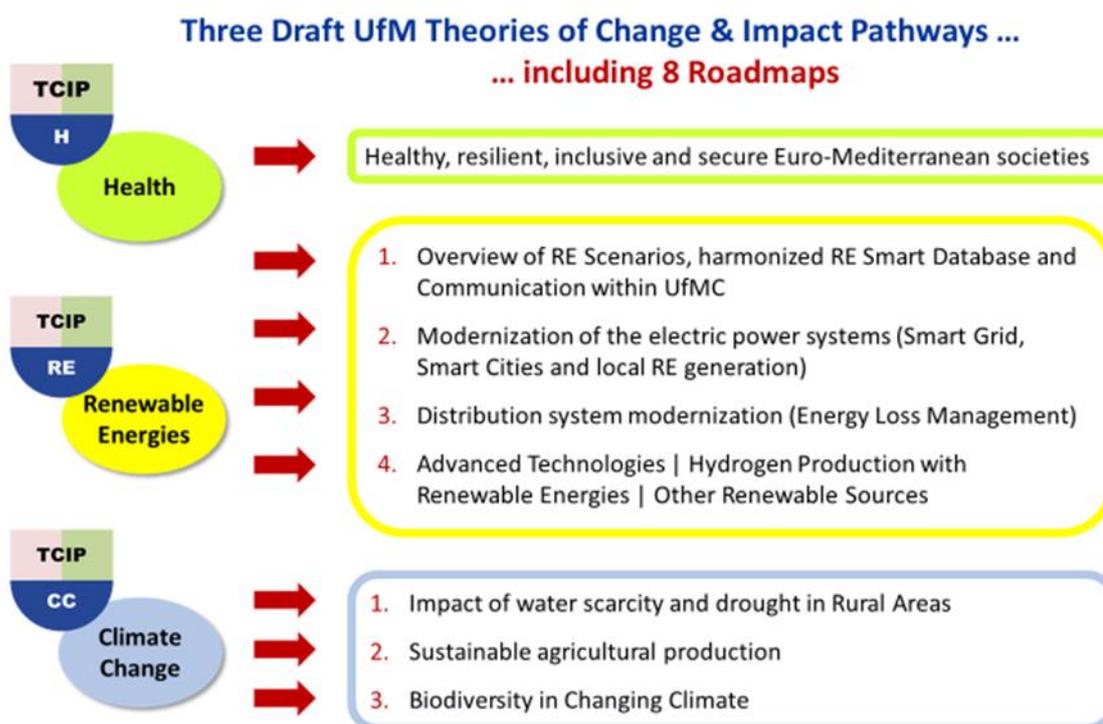
Implementation is key to ensure that the agreed priorities come into practice and are developed effectively generating the desired outcomes in the region, in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and 2030 Agenda. Therefore, the **objective of an Implementation Plan** is to guarantee and increase tailored effective investments for research and innovation and capacity building collaboration in the priority areas, including the sub-thematic points[2] identified. One of the possible outcomes of such as plan might also be the establishment of a long-term framework for coordinating stakeholder networks.

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[1] UfM Priorities in health, climate change, renewable energies and capacity building were developed in agreement with the UfM General Assembly in 2020. They were designed by the Expert Groups in the field starting from September 2020 and made accessible under an on-line public stakeholder consultation from 17 March to 7th May 2021.

[2] Full information on the process, including outcomes of past meetings, and the identified priorities can be found via this link: https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/strategy/international-cooperation/mediterranean_en

Fostering **existing frameworks and initiatives is a priority** before developing new ones. The **principles for implementation** at policy, programme and project level are those of cooperation and coordination, synergies and co-funding, and impact-driven and inclusiveness[3].

The **stakeholders[4] of the actuations envisioned** in an Implementation Plan are the stakeholders in research and innovation and capacity building in the region, including the society at large (NGOs, scientific institutions, researchers, and citizens), the socio-economic actors (businesses and entrepreneurs), and decision makers (including governments at all levels), as well as international organizations.

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[3] Meaning society at large and balance of representation, whenever possible.

Lessons Learned from the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA)[5]

What best practices from PRIMA should we consider going forward in our regional dialogue and implementation of the agreed priorities?

- **Strong alignment of PRIMA with major policies on EU and international scale**, e.g. Agenda 2030, Climate Neutrality, UfM Water Agenda, Food and Nutrition Security, and Sustainable Agriculture priority of the EU-Africa R&I cooperation.
- One of the good results is the **principle of equal footing** in overall governance and management of PRIMA, i.e. Board of Trustees were each participating states is represented (European Commission and UfM as observers), Steering Committee, Scientific Advisory Committee (co-chaired by UfM), and PRIMA Secretariat hosted by the UfM (Barcelona) which provides a political umbrella representing the Euro-Mediterranean region.
- Sustainability and **nexus approach between Water-energy-food-environment**; these elements are well integrated in the programming of PRIMA.
- **Strong collaboration with other international organisations** such as Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM), e.g. signed Memorandum of Understandings, Joint Initiatives, etc.
- **Capacity-building** (Massive Open On-line Course (MOOCs), e-learning, trainings to increase the capacities in submitting R&I proposals)
- A **Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning tool** exists and covers all projects in PRIMA. KPIs for the programme itself are established.
- Capacity of PRIMA of **attracting additional funds** (leverage of funds) and modalities set in place by PRIMA to facilitate **project results' uptake** by policies at national, regional and global levels. Activities set in place by PRIMA to foster acceleration and development of new or **improved products or interventions to the market**.
- Cooperation of **PRIMA with European Infrastructures**: on-going cooperation of PRIMA with Lifewatch ERIC to tackle biodiversity and ecosystem research and sustainable management in a global climate change scenario. The research facility has been a valuable source for data for PRIMA projects and a place for storage and sharing of PRIMA data.

How do we build on the success of PRIMA, especially reaching out to governments, possible donors, practitioners, for achieving R&I impact/results in the three areas of climate change, health/citizen's livelihood (e.g. impact of climate change in coastal areas), and renewable energies?

- One impact or major success of PRIMA is **greater coordination and alignment of national programming of R&I activities**, and of procedures and legislation in Participating States, some of them even had to redesign their policies to synchronize with PRIMA objectives.
- PRIMA projects focus on **inter-dependencies**, breaking silos through the nexus approach.
- PRIMA's governance model offers **parity (co-ownership and mutual benefits) between Northern and Southern Countries**.
- What is important and what has resulted well from PRIMA is capacity building, e.g. trainings of researchers by governments from different countries.

Implementation Modalities

This section is divided in three sections: Programmes, Instruments and Examples of Reference.

Programmes

Below are mentioned a selection of programmes that are proposed to be used as a part of the basis for the implementation of the UfM priorities.

The **European Union (EU) programmes** identified are:

- **Horizon Europe** is the EU's research and innovation (R&I) framework programme running from 2021-2027. It is the largest R&I funding programme in the World. In practice, key elements from the Roadmaps & TCIPs could be integrated in the next programming cycle of Horizon Europe, i.e. starting in 2023.
- **NDICI** is the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument. It is the EU's main financial tool to contribute to eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable development, prosperity, peace and stability.
- **Erasmus+**, the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe with an important international dimension.
- **Global programmes.** For example the GloPID-R (Global Research Collaboration for Infectious Disease Preparedness).
- **Regional programmes.** These are based on co-funding mechanisms and prioritisation on variable geometry. They have shown to be successful in the region. An example of which is PRIMA (Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area).
- **Bilateral programmes.** These are the programmes, which are implemented between two Mediterranean countries, focusing on the UfM priorities via their periodic calls and supporting both mobility and joint research of the Mediterranean researchers.
- **National programmes.** These are programmes that fund research and innovation at national level, but may dedicate a part of the funding to co-finance international programmes.

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[5] These observations were extracted from the exploratory workshop held between the European Commission and PRIMA on the 19th of May 2021. Full report of the meeting is available.

Instruments

The funding of research and innovation is done through **a set of established instruments** that show similarities among different programmes. Below are mentioned the most significant ones currently in use:

- **Collaborative research and innovation projects**, like Horizon Europe dedicated calls addressing the global challenges in the areas of health, climate change, and renewable energies; and PRIMA calls addressing agri-food systems, water, and their interlinkages under changing climate conditions, including their connections with Energy and Health
- **Funds that support business development** and innovation ecosystems, like the grant recently published under DG NEAR Programming on "strengthening innovation through supporting cluster cooperation and start-up ecosystems in the South Neighbourhood countries"[6]
- **Research facilities and infrastructure**, like for example: LifeWatch ERIC.
- **Mobility schemes for researchers and PhD students**, like for example the Horizon Europe Marie Sklodowska Curie Actions (MSCA).
- **Networks of collaboration,** like for example the COST programme.
- **Smart Specialisation Strategies for Research and Innovation**, already pioneered in Tunisia by the Joint Research Centre (JRC), in particular within the global cooperation on Science, Technology and Innovation Roadmaps for Sustainable Development Goals. The potential development of Technology Transfer Roadmaps by the JRC could also continue to support and strengthen technology transfer and innovative capacities of the South Mediterranean region (as a cross-cutting issue to support the UfM priorities for strengthening R&I collaboration).

Examples of Reference

In terms of good practices in the implementation of priorities the following has been identified:

- PRIMA's Annual Work Plans and related calls for proposals during the programme's duration (2018-2028) defined according to the priorities set in the PRIMA Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda.

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[6] Link to the grant and call for proposals (now closed) is accessible here: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/europeaid/online-services/index.cfm?do=publi.welcome&nbPubliList=15&orderby=upd&orderbyad=Desc&searchtype=RS&apply=N&aofr=171295&userlanguage=en

- [BLUEMED](#)'s Implementation Plan

Knowledge management and communication are further aspects of an implementation plan to be considered. A possible UfM Knowledge Management and Communication Framework (KMCF) may address a) research uptake and long-term science-end-user dialogues as well as b) the need for a long-term approach for Monitoring and Evaluation and Learning (MEL). A UfM KMCF would require a lean coordination infrastructure that would have to build on existing activities, networks and infrastructures, that are already addressing knowledge management and multilateral stakeholder communication.

Conclusions and recommendations

This Concept Note is **a brief document** that includes the potential modalities for implementation of the UfM Priorities in Research and Innovation (R&I) and capacity building. It includes for the mid-term perspective the implementation modalities that are proposed to be used and aims to create a **good opportunity** for an increased and more effective investment in the region but it addresses also the need of a long-term collaboration infrastructure and a framework in R&I and capacity building.

For the above and in the implementation stage the responsible stakeholders need to **take into consideration the following**:

- **Coordination and synergies** between the programmes and instruments given above are key.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation and Learning** (MEL)of policies, programmes, instruments and projects is key following the Theory of Change Impact Pathways in the established priorities.
- **Communication for the outreach** of R&I and capacity building actuations and dialogues between science and end-users in the region brings additional benefits to the overall priorities.

The UfM Secretariat could support the above recommendations and actions, while ensuring horizontal synergies with other UfM dialogues on climate change and renewable energy. The document is open for discussion by the UfM Regional Platform in R&I.

Potential Timeline towards adoption of full Implementation Plan

	Milestone	Activity
July 7th 2021	27th meeting of the UfM Regional Platfrom in R&I	Adoption of the Roadmaps/TCIPs and preliminary discussion on Implementation Modalities
Sep. 2021	Meeting of Funders as part of Stakeholder event to promote Roadmaps	Discussion of funding opportunities and establishing basic coordination measures for the implementation of the Roadmaps/TCIP. To possibly be integrated in a dedicated stakeholder event which is being planned together with CIHEAM to raise awareness of the adopted Roadmaps, as well as relevant calls in Horizon Europe for the region.
Dec 2021 /Jan 2022	Meeting of UfM Regional Platform in R&I	Discussion on more elaborated version of Implementation Plan
2022 (tbc)	Meeting of UfM regional Platform in R&I	Discussion on finalised version of Implementation Plan
2022 (tbc)	Ministerial Meeting of the UfM Regional Platform in R&I	Adoption of Ministerial Declaration