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ANNEX

to the Commission Implementing Decision on the financing of the multiannual action plan in favour of the Mediterranean University for 2025-2026

Action Document for the Mediterranean University

MULTIANNUAL ACTION PLAN

This document constitutes the multiannual work programme in the sense of Article 110(2) of the Financial Regulation, and action plan in the sense of Article 23(2) of the NDICI-Global Europe Regulation.

1. SYNOPSIS

1.1. Action Summary Table

1. Title **OPSYS** **Basic Act**	Mediterranean University Multiannual action plan in favour of the Mediterranean University for 2025-2026 OPSYS business reference: ACT-63401 SUMMA Funds reservation number: JAG.SUM.2108258 Financed under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI-Global Europe)
2. Economic and Investment Plan (EIP)	Yes
EIP Flagship	Yes Flagship 1 – Social sector, education, skills & health
3. Team Europe Initiative	Yes
4. Beneficiar(y)/(ies) of the Action	The Action shall be carried out in the Southern Neighbourhood countries: Algeria, Egypt, Israel[1], Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine*, Syria and Tunisia. Direct beneficiaries will be universities in these countries. As per Article 43(1) of NDICI-Global Europe Regulation, for reasons of efficiency and effectiveness, some activities may be extended to the Union for the Mediterranean and its member states, non-EU member states, as well as to countries neighbouring the Southern Neighbourhood and Gulf countries. This is justified because the Action intervenes in economic development, a field with transboundary characteristics, and may for limited activities and if needed to harness opportunities for extended impact, support cross-regional exchanges of best practices.

[1] See Guidelines on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards.

* This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue. Implementation of the present Action will integrate the recommendations of the Communication to the Commission on the review of ongoing financial assistance for Palestine C (2023) 8300, 21.11.2023.

	It is in line with the multi-annual indicative programme for the Southern Neighbourhood for 2021-2027, which makes reference to the importance of cross regional cooperation (priority 5, specific objective 2).
5. Programming document	MIP Regional Southern Neighbourhood
6. Link with relevant MIP(s) objectives/expected results	Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) for the Southern Neighbourhood 2021-2027. Priority area (1) human development, good governance and rule of law.
PRIORITY AREAS AND SECTOR INFORMATION	
7. Priority Area(s), sectors	Education – DAC Code 110
8. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Main SDG (1 only): 4 Quality Education Other significant SDGs: 5 Gender Equality; 8 Decent work and Economic growth; 9 Industry Innovation and Infrastructure; 10 Reduced inequalities; 17 Partnerships for the Goals.
9. DAC code(s)	11420 Higher education 100%
10. Main Delivery Channel @	Public sector institutions – 10000
11. Targets	☐ Migration ☐ Climate ☒ Social inclusion and Human Development ☒ Gender ☐ Biodiversity ☒ Human Rights, Democracy and Governance

12. Markers (from DAC form)

General policy objective @	**Not targeted**	**Significant objective**	**Principal objective**
Participation development/good governance	☐	☒	☐
Aid to environment @	☒	☐	☐
Gender equality and women's and girl's empowerment	☐	☒	☐
Reproductive, maternal, new-born and child health	☒	☐	☐
Disaster Risk Reduction @	☒	☐	☐
Inclusion of persons with Disabilities	☐	☒	☐
Nutrition @	☒	☐	☐
RIO Convention markers @	**Not targeted**	**Significant objective**	**Principal objective**
Biological diversity @	☒	☐	☐
Combat desertification @	☒	☐	☐
Climate change mitigation @	☒	☐	☐

13. Internal markers and Tags

Climate change adaptation @	☒	☐	☐
Policy objectives	**Not targeted**	**Significant objective**	**Principal objective**
EIP	☐	☒	☐
EIP Flagship	YES ☒		NO ☐
Tags	YES		NO
transport	☐		☒
energy	☒		☐
environment, climate resilience	☒		☐
digital	☒		☐
economic development (incl. private sector, trade and macroeconomic support)	☒		☐
human development (incl. human capital and youth)	☒		☐
health resilience	☐		☒
migration and mobility	☒		☐
agriculture, food security and rural development	☒		☐
rule of law, governance and public administration reform	☒		☐
other	☐		☒
Digitalisation @	☒	☐	☐
Tags	YES		NO
digital connectivity	☒		☐
digital governance	☐		☒
digital entrepreneurship	☒		☐
digital skills/literacy	☒		☐
digital services	☒		☐
Connectivity @	☒	☐	☐
Tags	YES		NO
digital connectivity	☒		☐
energy	☐		☒
transport	☐		☒
health	☐		☒
education and research	☒		☐
Migration @	☒	☐	☐

	Reduction of Inequalities @	☐	☒	☐
	COVID-19	☒	☐	☐
BUDGET INFORMATION				
14. Amounts concerned	Budget line(s) (article, item): 14020110 Southern Neighbourhood Total estimated cost: EUR 11 000 000 Total amount of EU budget contribution: EUR 11 000 000 The contribution is for an amount of EUR 1 000 000 from the general budget of the European Union for 2025 and for an amount of EUR 10 000 000 from the general budget of the European Union for 2026, subject to the availability of appropriations for the respective financial year following the adoption of the relevant annual budget, or as provided for in the system of provisional twelfths. The Action will be implemented with a Team Europe approach. The Action will be open to additional financial contributions from EU Member States.			
MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION				
15. Implementation modalities (management mode and delivery methods)	**Indirect management** with the entity(ies) to be selected in accordance with the criteria set out in section 4.3.1			

1.2. Summary of the Action

This Action represents the first phase of the Mediterranean University, a flagship initiative under the Pact for the Mediterranean[2] ('Pact'). This Action will contribute to the positioning of the Mediterranean region as a centre for transnational education and research. In line with the Union of Skills[3], the Action will support education and vocational training by forging collaborations among institutions, partner countries and the private sector, hence contributing to more integration and access to labour markets. The Mediterranean University shall be conceived and developed as a university-based academic initiative, governed according to academic principles.

In its current phase, the Action will establish an administrative body - the Secretariat - and conduct preparatory work for the roll-out of the Mediterranean University. The role of the Secretariat will be to facilitate the matchmaking between universities of the region, and the establishment of educational programmes, building upon existing actions and streamlining them as appropriate to avoid duplication and accelerate delivery. The Action will aim at reinforcing deeper institutionalised cooperation between a selected number of Mediterranean universities by setting up one or more consortia of universities, building on the experience of the European Universities alliances, and by supporting regular fora on academic cooperation in the region, but also on culture, arts and sports. This will help foster deeper institutionalised cooperation in the Common Mediterranean Space in education and research.

In the medium-term, the Action will aim at facilitating joint programmes leading to joint or multiple degrees, as well at creating short learning opportunities leading to joint micro-credentials. It will conduct a study on the steps necessary to establish a Mediterranean University institution with campuses across all shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The Action will also facilitate the goal of promoting students, researchers and academic staff exchanges across the region, including intra-MENA. The Action will be complemented by Erasmus+ and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions.

[2] JOIN (2025) 26, 16.10.2025.
[3] COM(2025) 90, 05.03.2025.

1.3. Beneficiar(y)/(ies) of the Action

The Action will target universities, which are right bearers, in EU Member States and in the ten EU southern Mediterranean[4] partners, with students, researchers and academic staff from these institutions as the final beneficiaries. The universities are expected to cooperate with Vocational Education and Training providers, which play a key role in contributing to skills development and applied research.

Building on the Pact for the Mediterranean, over time the Action has also the potential to expand its scope beyond the southern Mediterranean, building on synergies with other EU initiatives, such as the Strategic Partnership with the Gulf[5]. Where appropriate, the Action will explore and encourage participation in activities of mutual and strategic interest for Union for the Mediterranean member states (that are not directly covered by this Action[6]) and Gulf partners. The current Action could explore how and if this financing would be appropriate.[7]

2. RATIONALE

2.1. Context

The Pact for the Mediterranean offers a renewed opportunity to elevate the impact of higher education and research cooperation for the prosperity and resilience of the Euro-Mediterranean region. Increasing people-to-people exchanges is a key priority under the Pact, with both EU Member States and the southern Mediterranean partners emphasising academic and research exchanges as a much-needed area for enhanced cooperation given the geographical vicinity and relevance in terms of talent partnerships, as well as peace and stability in the Mediterranean.

There have been good results from the participation of the southern Mediterranean partners in the international dimension of the Erasmus+ programme, in particular, in International Credit Mobility, Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (EMJM) and Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE). While the Erasmus+ mobility scheme allows mobility across both shores of the Mediterranean Sea, the mobility potential is not fully realised in the Southern Neighbourhood due to the fact that it does not allow mobility within the region itself and due to budgetary constraints. On top of mobility exchanges, Erasmus+ supports universities in partner countries in terms of curriculum (re-)design, pedagogical staff development, quality assurance, and internationalisation. There is also a need to support the creation of joint curricula leading to joint or multiple degrees. Few examples already exist, such as a limited number of EMJM involving the southern Mediterranean partners.

Since 1995, various efforts have been made to strengthen interuniversity cooperation across the Mediterranean and to promote a closer cooperation in Higher Education, Research, and Cultural Exchange. However, these efforts have produced mixed results. For example, while a EuroMed Permanent University Forum was launched in 2006, it quickly lost momentum. A number of networks, such as the Mediterranean Universities Union (UNIMED), do exist and have been contributing to reinforcing the cooperation among universities, but they have so far not yet created a shift change, for example when it comes to joint programmes and joint/multiple degrees. The Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI), established in Piran (Slovenia) in 2008 as an institutional legacy of the Barcelona Process, has developed into a university-based Euro-Mediterranean cooperation platform, connecting universities and R&D institutions and supporting transnational education activities, joint learning formats remain limited though. The Euromed University of Fes (Morocco), endorsed by the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), offers joint degrees in collaboration with universities in Italy and France, but recognition of these degrees across the EU is not automatic. The UfM remains an important player as well and efforts are being made by the European Commission to launch a political dialogue on higher education under a first ever Ministerial Meeting envisaged for 2026, which

[4] The southern Mediterranean encompasses the ten partners of the Southern Neighbourhood.
[5] JOIN(2022) 13
[6] Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mauritania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Türkiye.
[7] Possible funding should be provided by relevant cross-regional allocations.

would also establish a platform on higher education to foster cooperation at operational level. Experience from existing networks demonstrates the added value of institutions that can bridge academic communities across all shores of the Mediterranean, including by convening universities, facilitating structured partnerships, and providing operational support for joint learning activities.

The Mediterranean University will be a coordinated political commitment to boost academic mobility institutional partnerships, and transnational education, with the long-term ambition to foster deeper institutionalised cooperation in education and research in the Common Mediterranean Space. Through enhanced cooperation among universities, the Action aims particularly at benefiting young people. It focuses on promoting inclusion and gender balance, while positioning the region as a centre for investment, education, research, innovation, and growth. Additionally, it seeks to enhance the region's ability to innovate, develop green skills, and support fair and inclusive transitions, all in alignment with the EU's Global Gateway Strategy. It will build on the lessons learned from the Erasmus+ international dimension, as well as from the work of UfM, UNIMED, and from university-based Euro-Mediterranean cooperation platforms such as EMUNI and the Euromed University of Fes. The Mediterranean University shall build on and integrate existing Euro-Mediterranean academic institutions, networks, and initiatives established since the Barcelona Process, ensuring continuity, coherence, and effective use of accumulated experience. Private sector consultations will be organised, in order to identify the labour market needs, ensuring links between university, potential employers and private investors, and seek potential support.

This Action contributes to the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan III (2021–2027), particularly Key Thematic area focussing on the Strengthening of economic and social rights and empowerment of women and girls.

2.2. Problem Analysis

Short problem analysis

In the past 20 years, we have witnessed the presence of persistent economic and political challenges in the EU Southern Neighbourhood, hampering its potential and growth. The ambition of a strong relation between the EU and its Southern partners was not matched by a corresponding progress and sufficient concrete initiatives for cooperation and economic and political integration.

Concrete university cooperation, joint educational programmes, and eventually a Mediterranean University institution, is a means of underpinning the special relations between the EU and its southern Mediterranean partners with a tangible initiative and offer.

While inter-university cooperation has existed since the 1995 Barcelona Process, past efforts yielded mixed results in terms of structured exchanges and joint programmes, due to fragmented initiatives and limited impact. Despite widespread political support, higher education cooperation across all shores of the Mediterranean Sea remains constrained by fragmented systems, uneven recognition of qualifications, funding, and limited mobility opportunities. This Action will give a structured and stable framework of cooperation, both institutionally, politically and financially.

The present Action will complement ongoing actions under the international dimension of the Erasmus+ programme and Horizon Europe. Erasmus+ mobilities and Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Scholarships will broaden learning opportunities. By enabling exposure to diverse pedagogical methods, curricula, and research environments, such mobility enhances both soft skills (adaptability and intercultural communication) and technical skills aligned with the needs of the Mediterranean labour market. Moreover, increased mobility would encourage universities to adopt best practices, integrate regional knowledge, and modernise their academic offerings to better serve students and society alike.

Existing inequalities in higher education access within the region and can also hinder higher education cooperation in the southern Mediterranean. Women, though often well-represented in enrolments, remain underrepresented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education, academic

leadership, and international mobility due to cultural, financial, and caregiving barriers. Higher education enrolment in the region was estimated at around 45% in 2022, with women reaching approximately 50%.[8] Despite this, gendered labour market outcomes remain unequal. Students with disabilities face even greater barriers: most countries lack reliable data, with the exception of isolated national surveys (e.g., Algeria, 2017), and disability-inclusive interventions at the higher education level remain very limited[9]. In addition, a significant gender digital divide persists in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, limiting women's and girls' access to digital education and innovation opportunities[10]. Curricula in higher education also remain largely gender-blind, with limited integration of gender equality and inclusive pedagogy reducing the transformative potential of education systems[11]. These gaps in inclusion and accountability systems highlight the need for a human rights-based and transformative approach, ensuring equal participation and institutional change rather than only numerical balance.

Identification of main stakeholders and corresponding institutional and/or organisational issues (mandates, potential roles, and capacities) to be covered by the action.

The main stakeholders will be universities, both in the EU Member States and in the southern Mediterranean partner countries that will have the willingness, capacity, political backing, credibility and vision to join the Mediterranean University, with the eventual long-term goal of forming a unified institution. Universities and academic fields will be preselected in the inception phase of the Action, with the intention to focus on strategic yet non politically sensitive/technical academic fields, with a strong labour market potential. Specific selection criteria will be further developed at the inception phase financed under this Action. Universities shall be the primary right-bearers and implementing actors for academic outputs.

The expectation is that national governments, both in the EU and in partner countries, will need to ensure political support and possible financial support in the long-term, for the consolidation of the initiative and the establishment of a Mediterranean University institution. National governments may have a role also with in kind contributions, by, for example, offering buildings where to host the future Secretariat and university.

The UfM and the UNIMED will support the roll out of the Mediterranean University activities, and they will be associated to its implementation.

The Action will be open to consider the coordination with other relevant stakeholders such as, for example (non-exclusive list): the UfM Platform on Research and Innovation the UfM Platform on Employment and Labour (and notably its UfM Community of Practices on Youth Employment), as well as the future UfM Platform in Higher Education foreseen to be established in 2026, the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA), the 5+5 Dialogue, the European Institute of the Mediterranean, the Association of Arab Universities, the Anna Lindh Foundation and other cultural, arts and sport organisations from EU Member States and from the southern Mediterranean partners.

2.3. Lessons Learned

The International Credit Mobility under Erasmus+ has proven to be a success for the EU, with almost 1 400 mobility projects implemented in approximately 490 universities across ten southern Mediterranean partners between 2022 and 2024. These projects resulted in a total of 25 083 planned mobilities participants (17 270

[8] UK Aid, Available data on access to higher education for students with disabilities in Africa, South and South-East Asia and MENA regions, 2024, Disability Inclusion Helpdesk Report No: 114 DID Helpdesk Query 114 - Higher education for students with disabilities in Africa South and South-East Asia MENA.pdf
[9] Ibidem
[10] Gender digital divide: The new face of inequality in the MENA region, 2024, Gender digital divide: The new face of inequality in the MENA region – Global Campus of Human Rights
[11] UNESCO's efforts to achieve gender equality in and through education, 2021, UNESCO's efforts to achieve gender equality in and through education, 2021 highlights - UNESCO Digital Library

planned mobilities from the south Mediterranean partners to Erasmus+ 33 countries[12] and 7 813 planned mobilities in the opposite direction). These mobility projects have also increased the cooperation among universities across the Mediterranean.

The Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) component of Erasmus+ contributed to the relevance, quality, modernisation and responsiveness of higher education in the EU Southern Neighbourhood. It led to new or revised curricula, training courses for academic and non-academic staff, new learning methods, tools and materials, and better synergies between the academic and non-academic sectors.

The National Erasmus+ Offices (NEOs) have been providing information on Erasmus+ by assisting applicants and participants, and supporting policy dialogues, while maintaining contact with local authorities and EU Delegations. Alongside the NEOs, the network of local Higher Education Reform Experts (HEREs) helped organise information events.

The Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (EMJM) have also shown that integrated, high-quality programmes - built on strong partnerships between Member States and partner country universities - can enhance trust and long-term academic networks that significantly strengthen people-to-people ties. However, because of financing under Heading 2 of the EU budget, and competition with intra-EU joint Masters, uptake in the southern Mediterranean remains relatively low. Between 2021 and 2025, there have been only six cases of universities from the southern Mediterranean (Israel, Tunisia, Morocco and Lebanon) acting as coordinators or full hosting partners in EMJM consortia. During the same period, 810 scholarships have been awarded to students from the southern Mediterranean region also thanks to additional funding for scholarships under Heading 6 of the EU budget (EUR 13.2 million in 2021-2027).

Despite these efforts, several challenges persist. Mobility flows remain predominantly South to North, with less flows North to South, and few opportunities for intra-regional exchange, limiting the development of regional knowledge and academic cooperation within the MENA region. Also, recognition of qualifications and credits remains a barrier due to fragmented systems and limited mutual trust among institutions. Additional factors such as administrative and legal hurdles (i.e., visa issues, curricula difference, accreditation issues, administrative capacity), political instability and security concerns continue to hinder mobility schemes. Strategic communication and information remain also an issue. These challenges reflect also the diverse cultural and political contexts that need to be considered.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION

3.1. Objectives and Expected Outputs

The **Overall Objective** of the Action is to foster deeper institutionalised cooperation in education and research in the Common Mediterranean Space, which will allow closer cooperation on student, researchers and academic staff mobility, and improvement in skills.

The **Specific Objectives (Outcomes)** of the Action are to:

1. Carry out the preparatory steps to establish inclusive governance and administrative structures for the Mediterranean University, ensuring gender equality, accessibility and active participation of youth;
2. Facilitate cooperation between EU-MENA universities and intra-MENA universities, and support mobility-related schemes for students, researchers and academic staff, ensuring gender balance and inclusion of people with disabilities in educational opportunities.

[12] All EU Member States, plus six non-EU countries associated to Erasmus+ (Türkiye, North Macedonia, Serbia, Iceland, Norway, and Liechtenstein).

The **Outputs** to be delivered by this Action contributing to the corresponding Specific Objectives are:

Contributing to Specific Objective 1

1.1. Establishment of a Secretariat tasked to carry out administrative, operational and coordination responsibilities of the Mediterranean University;
1.2. Selection of universities participating in one or more pilot Mediterranean University consortia, ensuring that they meet accessibility requirements for people with disabilities.

Contributing to Specific Objective 2

2.1. Establishment of one or more pilot Mediterranean University consortia and organisation of fora, with the support and coordination of the Secretariat;
2.2. Scaling up/designing new components of intra-MENA mobility schemes for students, researchers and academic staff ensuring gender balance and inclusion of people with disabilities;
2.3. Facilitating the establishment of joint programmes leading to joint/multiple degrees joint micro-credential certifications, including summer schools and graduate study programmes, and diploma recognition.

3.2. Indicative Activities

Activities related to Output 1.1

- Identification of location(s), development of the organisation structure for the Secretariat;
- Development and implementation of dissemination and communication strategies covering the activities of the present Action;
- Establishment of the "Study in the Mediterranean" portal that consolidates all relevant mobility-related schemes for students, researchers and academic staff in the MENA region, similar to the "Study in Europe" portal;
- Launch of a feasibility study for establishing a Mediterranean University institution, followed by the design of its structures, possible location(s), curricula (including common EU/MENA strategic academic fields for innovation and sustainable growth), and funding model, building on the experience of the universities part of the pilot Mediterranean University consortia;
- Develop codes of conduct on non-discrimination and equality;
- Support partner universities' capacities on human rights-based approach (HRBA), including in drafting Gender Equality Action Plans and Disability Inclusion Plans;
- Train administrators on inclusive governance.

Activities related to Output 1.2

- Set up of a Steering Committee of the Action;
- Definition of the selection criteria for the universities which will participate in the pilot consortia;
- Launch of a call for expressions of interest to select interested universities and relevant stakeholders;
- Consultation with respective national authorities, including ministries, women's organisations, Persons with Disabilities Organisations (PDOs), and student bodies, and selection of suitable and interested universities;
- Re-adaptation of the list of participating universities and stakeholders if needed, based on regular reassessment of the Steering Committee of the Action, if needed include civil society, student groups, and women/PDOs networks in Steering Committee.

Activities related to Output 2.1

- Preparatory work by the Secretariat for the formalisation of the pilot Mediterranean University consortia between universities from the Mediterranean region: academic fields, number of universities, possible decomposition of the pilot Mediterranean University consortia in sub-groups of

universities depending on the academic field and/or potential for institutional cooperation, ensuring equity representation across the region;
- Identification of themes, design of agenda, and organisation of fora to foster network exchanges, beyond university/academic cooperation, including also culture, arts, and sports.

Activities related to Output 2.2

- Support of mobilities targeting students and academic staff of the universities participating in the Mediterranean University initiative. The Action will operate in conjunction and close coordination with the 2026 and 2027 work programmes of Erasmus+;
- Support of mobility of researchers in complementarity with Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions;
- Design and implementation of an Intra-MENA Academic Mobility Scheme;
- Collection of sex-, age-, and disability-disaggregated data.

Activities related to Output 2.3

- Design and creation of joint programmes leading to multiple/joint degrees with the universities participating in the pilot Mediterranean University consortia, in complementarity with Erasmus+;
- Design of joint micro-credential certifications with the universities and stakeholders participating and collaborating in the pilot Mediterranean University consortia;
- Design of summer schools in collaboration with EU Delegations and graduate study programmes in collaboration with the UfM, with support and coordination from the Secretariat;
- Administrative and legal support to the universities for the necessary agreements, Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) and accreditation in the respective national systems.

3.3. Mainstreaming

Environmental Protection, Climate Change and Biodiversity

The Action will integrate to the extent possible environmental and climate change considerations in the planning of its activities, including in relation to travels and the setting up of new structures. In addition, the Action will potentially target academic studies in fields related to sustainable industries and promote employment opportunities in the same fields. There are strong opportunities in the MENA region, notably related to water resources management, renewable and clean energy, the circular economy and eco-innovation, digitalisation for sustainability, sustainable urban and industrial development, and the sustainable blue economy. More generally, the Action will explore how higher education, and research could enable EU-MENA joint priority investments under EU's Global Gateway Strategy, for instance through joint academic programmes that equip graduates and universities with skills and capacities in such priority fields.

Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls

As per OECD Gender DAC codes identified in section 1.1, this Action is labelled as G1. This implies that gender considerations will be mainstreamed in all activities under this Action to the extent possible. The Action will in particular strive to ensure a gender balance in the students, researchers, and academic staff that will benefit of the Action. A gender balance will also be sought in the composition of the administrative structures of the Secretariat, in the pilot consortia, and in the future Mediterranean University institution. In addition, the Action will address structural gender inequalities in higher education and research. Monitoring will go beyond sex-disaggregated data to assess whether women's academic and professional opportunities are substantively improved, thereby moving towards a transformative approach.

Human Rights

The Action is fully aligned with existing EU human rights strategies and Action plans. It will contribute to reducing inequalities by improving access to quality higher education and increased international recognition of diplomas and qualifications. The Action will ensure that groups with specific needs (women, persons with disabilities, youth, among other groups) will take an active part and participate in the activities of the Mediterranean University. The Action will apply HRBA by explicitly identifying rights-holders (students, researchers, women, youth, persons with disabilities) and duty-bearers (universities, ministries, accreditation bodies) and strengthening their capacities accordingly. Accountability will be reinforced through transparent selection procedures, grievance mechanisms for students, researchers and academic staff, and the involvement of independent evaluators with HRBA expertise. Participation will be broadened to include student organisations, women's networks, and PDOs in both governance structures and consultations, ensuring inclusivity and local ownership.

Disability

As per OECD Disability DAC codes identified in section 1.1, this Action is labelled as D1. This implies that careful consideration will be given to access for persons with disabilities when selecting the universities participating in the pilot consortia and when designing the Mediterranean University institution. The Action will consult PDOs in the design and monitoring of activities, and progress will be measured with disability-specific indicators. In addition, the Action will help to mainstream the adoption of inclusive education measures, including universal design in curricula and facilities, support for digital accessibility, and funding for assistive technologies. Student, researchers and academic staff mobility schemes will integrate reasonable accommodation measures.

Democracy

By reinforcing university cooperation and people to people, as well as cultural exchanges between the EU and the southern Mediterranean, the Action will spread and reinforce democracy and democratic values.

Conflict sensitivity, peace and resilience

Increased university cooperation and people exchanges will be a vehicle of increased understanding between cultures and will temper political sensitivities, ultimately increasing resilience, and contributing to reduction of conflicts, and the promotion of peace.

Disaster Risk Reduction

Not applicable.

3.4. Risks and Assumptions

Category	Risks	Likelihood (High/ Medium/ Low)	Impact (High/ Medium/ Low)	Mitigating measures
External Environment	Political crisis	High	Medium	Political crises and regional instability already exist in the region, and others may emerge. However, these should not have a major impact on the Action because of the non-sensitive nature of its activities. The Action itself can in fact be a preventing and/or mitigating factor for political crisis.
External Environment	Lack of political support	Medium	High	Political support is robust on university cooperation; however, it may be less strong regarding the establishment of a

				Mediterranean University institution. Nonetheless, this subject goes beyond the scope of the present Action, and one of its objectives is precisely to gauge the political backing for such institution and paving the way for its establishment.
Planning, processes and systems	Lack of sufficient funding for increasing mobilities and establishing a fully-fledged university	High	High	Important promotion of the Mediterranean University activities will be done via this Action and other channels. Funding sources will be diversified among different EU instruments, and possible contribution from national budgets, and private funding.
Planning, processes and systems	Lack of focus	Medium	Medium	The Action will focus on a limited number of selected fields and the participating universities in the pilot Mediterranean University consortia will be limited in number.
External Environment	Lack of institutional development, economic growth and political integration of the Mediterranean region, eventually leading to lack of success of the Mediterranean University and of deeper institutionalised cooperation in education and research in the Common Mediterranean Space	High	High	The ambition for a more integrated and more central Mediterranean region has existed since the 1995 Barcelona Declaration, yet it has achieved mixed results. The Pact for the Mediterranean seeks to provide renewed momentum but achieving this requires robust political support and economic transformation. The Action will evolve and adapt in response to the concrete political and economic realisation of this ambition.
Planning, processes and systems	Legal and administrative hurdles in the setting up and recognition of joint diplomas	Medium	Medium	Since there are already some examples of joint programmes, the legal and administrative challenges should not be insurmountable. The Action will enlist legal experts to assist in navigating these processes.
Planning, processes and systems	Persistence of gender inequalities, discriminatory practices, or lack of accessibility in universities may undermine inclusiveness and	Medium	High	Require participating universities in the pilot consortia to adopt Gender Equality and Disability Inclusion Action Plans; The Action will provide targeted capacity building on HRBA and inclusive governance; monitor mobility and programme participation with sex-, age-, and disability-

	limit participation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities.			disaggregated data; establish grievance mechanisms for students, researchers and academic staff.

External Assumptions

- The political situation in the Mediterranean region does not deteriorate or possibly improves;
- The Mediterranean University is perceived as a positive vehicle of cooperation and conciliation, moving beyond political and cultural differences;
- The Mediterranean University receives general political support both in the EU Member States and in the southern Mediterranean partners;
- Interest is generated among universities and in both EU and partner countries governments for hosting the Secretariat and the Mediterranean University institution;
- Students, researchers and academic staff both in the EU Member States and in partner countries will embrace the Mediterranean University with enthusiasm;
- Interest is also generated in the private sector.

3.5 Intervention Logic

The underlying guiding principle for the intervention logic of this Action is that, in order to enhance prosperity and stability in the targeted region, the EU needs to undertake concrete initiatives of cooperation and integration in the higher education and research sectors, recognising a status and offering opportunities that differentiate them from countries further afield. Such endeavour is also rich in soft power and can also help bridge cultural differences.

The Action aims to establish the Secretariat of the Mediterranean University and to support projects that foster deeper institutionalised cooperation in education and research in the Common Mediterranean Space, leveraging the people to people dimension in the region and enhancing opportunities of exchange for its citizens. In the short-term, this means facilitating mobility opportunities for students, researchers and academic staff. In the medium-term, it entails the establishment of one or several Mediterranean University consortia of selected universities, reinforcing the cooperation between university via regular fora on academic cooperation, culture, arts and sports and the creation of joint programmes/degrees and joint micro-credential programmes. The long-term objective of the Mediterranean University flagship initiative of the Pact for the Mediterranean - which will follow-up this Action - is the creation of an institution with campuses across all shores of the Mediterranean Sea, fostering a genuine sense of equality among students, researchers and academic staff. The pilot Mediterranean University consortia shall be designed as building blocks toward a future Mediterranean University institution, with defined milestones, governance evolution, and evaluation mechanisms.

The Mediterranean University is envisaged as a strong endeavour, serving as a symbol of unity and centrality for the Mediterranean region, contributing to the Common Mediterranean Space. It shall be developed with a view to long-term sustainability, combining EU instruments, national and private contributions, and institutional commitments by participating universities and host countries.

The **Theory of Change** for the Action reads as follows:

IF, the Action successfully supports initiatives that:

- Ensure that the preparatory steps for establishing governance and administrative structures for the Mediterranean University are undertaken;
- Strengthen cooperation between EU–MENA universities and within the MENA region through mobility schemes for students, researchers, and academic staff.

AND, the following assumptions hold true:

- Governance and administrative structures set up is ensured;
- Strong interest is generated among universities, as well as within governments from both the EU and southern Mediterranean partners;
- Political support is secured;
- Availability of funding is ensured;
- An effective implementing partner and a well-functioning consortium of Mediterranean universities are in place;
- Students, researchers, and academic staff - both in the EU and in partner countries - actively engage with and embrace the Mediterranean University.

THEN, this will contribute to creating, maintaining and fostering the conditions for the implementation of this Action and beyond, particularly the fostering of deeper institutionalised cooperation in education and research in the Common Mediterranean Space, with the long-term view of creating a Mediterranean University institution with campuses across all shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

3.6 Indicative Logical Framework Matrix

Results	Results chain: Main expected results [maximum 10 @]	Indicators [it least one indicator per expected result @]	Baselines (values and years)	Targets (values and years)	Sources of data	Assumptions
Impact	The Common Mediterranean Space is more inclusive and integrated in higher education and research, allowing closer cooperation on student, researchers and academic staff mobility.	**1** An Intra-MENA Academic Mobility Scheme is established. **2** A Mediterranean University institution offering the possibility to study on all shores of the Mediterranean. **3** More integrated and inclusive higher education and research across the Mediterranean region.	**1** 0 in 2025 **2** 0 structures in place in 2025 **3** 0 in 2025	**1** 1 in 2030 **2** At least 1 structure in place in 2030 **3** Higher education and research cooperation across the Mediterranean includes stakeholders from the majority of the EU and partner countries	DG MENA	*Not applicable*

Outcome 1	Preparatory steps to establish the governance and structures of the Mediterranean University are taken.	**1.1** A Secretariat is established. **1.2** Universities interested in forming part of the consortia are selected. **1.3** Feasibility study and detailed concept proposal for the Mediterranean University institution completed.	**1.1** No Secretariat in 2025 **1.2** No universities in 2025 **1.3** No study, neither a concept proposal in 2025	**1.1** One Secretariat in 2026 **1.2** At least ten universities in 2027 **1.3** One complete study and concept note in 2026	DG MENA	Administrative set up proceeds smoothly. Interest is generated among universities and in both EU and southern Mediterranean partners' governments.
Outcome 2	Cooperation between EU-MENA universities and intra-MENA universities is increased through mobility-related schemes for students, researchers and academic staff.	**2.1** At least one Mediterranean University consortium is established **2.2** Number of EU-MENA exchanges increases: a) students; b) researchers; c) academic staff. **2.3** Number of supported programmes increases: a) Joint programmes b) Joint micro-credentials c) Summer School d) Graduate Study Programme	**2.1** 0 in 2025 **2.2** a) 4500 in 2024 b) 200 in 2024 c) 4000 in 2024 **2.3** a) 6 in 2025 b) 0 in 2025 c) 0 in 2025 d) 0 in 2025	**2.1** 1 in 2026 **2.2** a) 9000 in 2030 b) 240 in 2030 c) 4800 in 2030 **2.3** a) 10 in 2027 b) 10 in 2030 c) 1 yearly after 2026 d) 1 yearly after 2026	DG EAC (via Erasmus+) / DG RTD (via Horizon Europe) / DG MENA	Political support. Availability of funding. Performing implementing partner and functioning Mediterranean University consortia Students, researchers and academic staff both in the EU and partner countries will embrace the Mediterranean University with enthusiasm.

4. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

4.1. Financing Agreement

In order to implement this Action, it is not envisaged to conclude a financing agreement with the partner countries.

4.2. Indicative Implementation Period

The indicative operational implementation period of this Action, during which the activities described in Section 3 will be carried out and the corresponding contracts and agreements implemented, is 72 months from the date of adoption by the Commission of this Financing Decision.

Extensions of the implementation period may be agreed by the Commission's responsible authorising officer in duly justified cases by amending this Financing Decision and the relevant contracts and agreements.

4.3. Implementation Modalities

The Commission will ensure that the EU appropriate rules and procedures for providing financing to third parties are respected, including review procedures, where appropriate, and compliance of the Action with EU restrictive measures[13].

4.3.1 Indirect Management with one or more pillar-assessed entities

This Action may be implemented in indirect management with one or a consortium of pillar-assessed entities, which will be selected by the Commission's services using the following criteria:

- Completed pillar assessment;
- Proven established experience and operational capacity in the management and implementation of education and human capital development actions in the countries concerned;
- Technical competence in the sector and leverage for policy dialogue, including technical expertise in education and human capital development sectors;
- Administrative capability and the experience to implement this type of intervention due to its mandate and expertise;
- Understanding of the complexities of inter-institutional cooperation, joint degree design, and higher education quality standards;
- Extensive network of national and international partners, which can be drawn on;
- Demonstrated capacity to coordinate with relevant stakeholders including national ministries, selected universities, International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOS) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and among international and local actors at both EU and country level;
- A robust, reliable and tested internal control mechanism to prevent, detect and deter non-compliance with EU restrictive measures.

Because of their unique expertise and network in the beneficiary countries concerned, UfM and UNIMED will be associated to the implementation of the Action by the selected pillar assessed entity(ies).

[13] www.sanctionsmap.eu Please note that the sanctions map is an IT tool for identifying the sanctions regimes. The source of the sanctions stems from legal acts published in the Official Journal (OJ). In case of discrepancy between the published legal acts and the updates on the website it is the OJ version that prevails.

4.3.2 Changes from indirect to direct management due to exceptional circumstances

If the implementation modality under indirect management cannot be implemented due to circumstances beyond the control of the Commission, the modality of implementation by grants and/or by procurement under direct management would be used.

Grants would target university networks directly enabling them to establish and sustaining one or more Mediterranean University consortia.

Procurement contracts would target service providers that are able to facilitate and coordinate the establishment of the Secretariat.

4.3.3 Scope of geographical eligibility for procurement and grants

The geographical eligibility in terms of place of establishment for participating in procurement and grant award procedures and in terms of origin of supplies purchased as established in the basic act and set out in the relevant contractual documents shall apply, subject to the following provisions.

The Commission's authorising officer responsible may extend the geographical eligibility on the basis of urgency or of unavailability of services in the markets of the countries or territories concerned, or in other duly substantiated cases where application of the eligibility rules would make the realisation of this Action impossible or exceedingly difficult (Article 28(10) of the NDICI-Global Europe Regulation).

4.5. Indicative Budget

Indicative budget components	**EU contribution (amount in EUR)**
Implementation modalities – cf. section 4.3	
Indirect management with pillar-assessed entity(ies) – cf. section 4.3.1	11 000 000
Evaluation – cf. section 5.2 **Audit** – cf. section 5.3	may be covered by another Decision
Strategic communication and Public diplomacy – cf. section 6	may be covered by another Decision
Totals	**11 000 000**

4.6. Organisational Set-up and Responsibilities

As concerns the implementation of outputs 1.1, 1.2 and 2.1, a **Steering Committee** providing guidance and strategic orientation will be established. It will be chaired by the European Commission and will comprise the selected pillar-assessed entity, or consortium of pillar-assessed entities, the Secretariat of the Mediterranean University, UfM and UNIMED. It will be convened twice a year. The pillar assessed entity(ies) will take care of the organisation and convening of the Steering Committee on behalf of the Commission. Additional parties may be invited to attend the Steering Committee meetings upon authorisation by the Commission. In addition, **biannual meetings of the Mediterranean University**, where all member universities will be invited to attend, will take place back-to-back with the Steering Committee meetings. The Secretariat will take care of the organisation and convening of the meetings. Additional parties may be invited to attend the Mediterranean University meetings upon authorisation by the Commission.

To ensure balanced representation and operational efficiency, a **Secretariat** will be established with direct support of the selected pillar-assessed entity(ies). The operational structure of the Secretariat will be defined in the delegate agreement with the pillar-assessed entity(ies) based on the following principles:

- Equal footing between EU Member States and southern Mediterranean partners;
- Support of competent entities, the UfM and UNIMED;
- Balanced academic representation in staffing and decision-preparation.

The Secretariat will ensure day to day operations of this Action and coordination with its members, offer legal support and alignment with EU policies, and provide financial oversight. It will serve as the entry point for the Initiative and help identify additional sources of funding for the long-term objective, such as within Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, possible National budget contributions, and private funding, including from Foundations active in the area of Higher Education. It will capitalise on the early results of the Mediterranean University consortia for the design of the Mediterranean University institution.

5. PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

5.1. Monitoring and Reporting

Arrangements for monitoring and reporting, including roles and responsibilities for data collection, analysis and monitoring:

The day-to-day technical and financial monitoring of the implementation of this Action will be a continuous process, and part of the implementing partner's responsibilities. To this aim, the implementing partner shall establish a permanent internal, technical and financial monitoring system for the Action and elaborate regular progress reports (not less than annual) and final reports. Every report shall provide an accurate account of implementation of the Action, difficulties encountered, changes introduced, as well as the degree of achievement of its Outputs and contribution to the achievement of its Outcomes, and if possible, at the time of reporting, contribution to the achievement of its impacts, as measured by corresponding indicators, using as reference the logical framework matrix.

The Commission may undertake additional project monitoring visits both through its own staff and through independent consultants recruited directly by the Commission for independent monitoring reviews (or recruited by the responsible agent contracted by the Commission for implementing such reviews).

The project's monitoring and reporting system will integrate gender-responsive and HRBA measures, including sex-disaggregated data and specific questions in monitoring tools, with expertise on gender equality, human rights, and disability included in the monitoring teams.

5.2. Evaluation

Having regard to the importance of the Action, a mid-term or a final evaluation may be carried out for this Action or its components via independent consultants contracted by the Commission.

In case of mid-term evaluation, it will be carried out for learning purposes, in particular with respect to the intention to launch a new phase of the Action when relevant. In case of final evaluation, it will be carried out for accountability and learning purposes, including for policy revision.

The Commission shall form a Reference Group (RG) to assist and inform the evaluators, composed by representatives from the main stakeholders at both EU and national (representatives from the government, from civil society organisations (private sector, NGOs, etc.), etc.) levels. If deemed necessary, other donors will be invited to join.

The Commission shall inform the implementing partner at least 30 days in advance of the dates envisaged for the evaluation exercise and missions. The implementing partner shall collaborate efficiently and effectively with the evaluation experts and inter alia provide them with all necessary information and documentation, as well as access to the project premises and activities.

The evaluation shall assess to what extent the Action is taking into account the human rights-based approach as well as how it contributes to gender equality and disability inclusion. Expertise on human rights, disability and gender equality will be ensured in the evaluation teams.

The evaluation reports shall be shared with the partner countries and other key stakeholders following the best practice of evaluation dissemination. The implementing partner and the Commission shall analyse the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluations and, where appropriate, in agreement with the partner countries, jointly decide on the follow-up actions to be taken and any adjustments necessary, including, if indicated, the reorientation of the project.

The financing of the evaluation shall be covered by another measure constituting a Financing Decision.

5.3. Audit and Verifications

Without prejudice to the obligations applicable to contracts concluded for the implementation of this Action, the Commission may, on the basis of a risk assessment, contract independent audit or verification assignments for one or several contracts or agreements.

6. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

All entities implementing EU-funded external actions have the contractual obligation to inform the relevant audiences of the Union's support for their work by displaying the EU emblem and a short funding statement as appropriate on all communication materials related to the actions concerned. To that end they must comply with the instructions given in the 2022 guidance document *Communicating and raising EU visibility: Guidance for external actions* (or any successor document).

This obligation will apply equally, regardless of whether the concerned interventions are implemented by the Commission, the partner countries, service providers, grant beneficiaries or entrusted or delegated entities such as UN agencies, international financial institutions and agencies of EU Member States. In each case, a reference to the relevant contractual obligations must be included in the respective financing agreement, procurement and grant contracts, and contribution agreements.

For the purpose of enhancing the visibility of the EU and its contribution to this Action, the Commission may sign or enter into joint declarations or statements, as part of its prerogative of budget implementation and to safeguard the financial interests of the Union. Visibility and communication measures should also promote transparency and accountability on the use of funds. Effectiveness of communication activities on awareness about the Action and its objectives as well as on EU funding of the Action should be measured.

Implementing partners shall keep the Commission fully informed of the planning and implementation of specific visibility and communication activities before the implementation. Implementing partners will ensure adequate visibility of EU financing and will report on visibility and communication actions as well as the results of the overall Action to the relevant monitoring committees.