Implementation Plan

Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) R&I Priorities

June 2022

This is a living document that is meant to be bi-annually updated by the UfM Regional Platform on Research and Innovation (R&I)

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Introduction

The **Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Regional Platform in Research and Innovation**[1] agreed on the research and innovation **priorities envisioned in the Theories of Change and Impact Pathways (TCIPs) Roadmaps**[2], developed by the Expert Groups that were convened by the European Commission and the UfM and were consulted with the stakeholders at large. The UfM Regional Platform for R&I, on 7 July 2021, adopted the roadmaps on jointly agreed R&I priority areas and proposed to hold an R&I Ministerial meeting in the region in 2022.
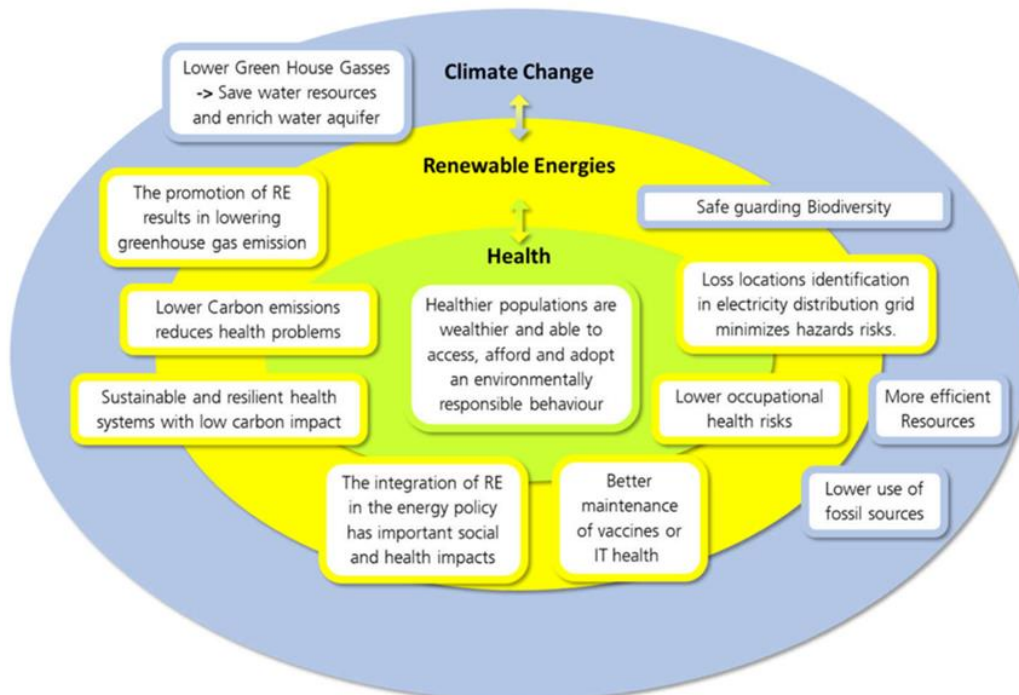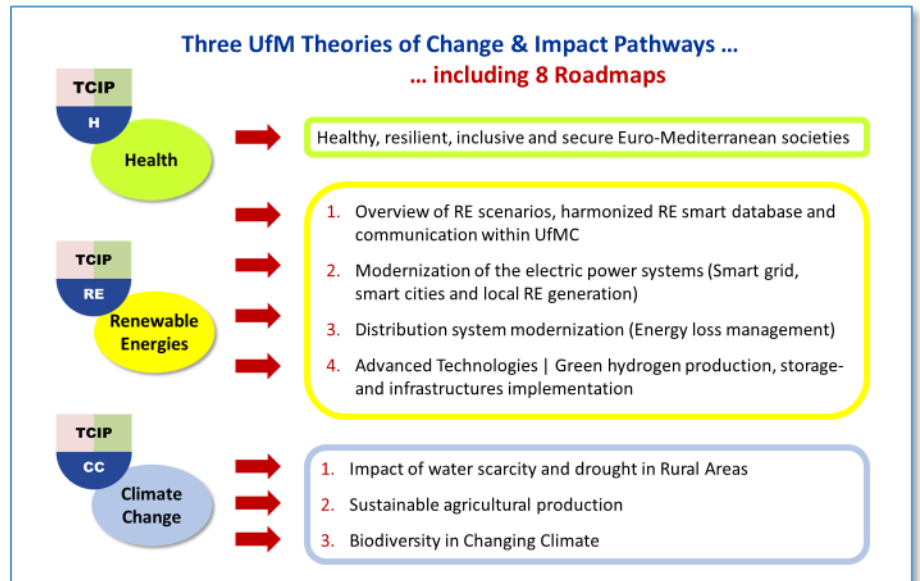

Illustration of interlinkages between the three priority areas (not exhaustive).

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[1] In its meeting of 7 July 2021.

[2] https://ufmsecretariat.org/new-research-and-innovation-agenda/

The Roadmaps have been developed into three different TCIPs, including different roadmaps. They started from the awareness of the diversified core constraints of Euro-Mediterranean Countries, encompassing the strategic activities that must be supported for promoting Research and Innovation (R&I) in each of the three areas identified as strategic: Health, Renewable Energies and Climate Change.

The overall objective will be to achieve a long-term capacity development for the region, with significant social impacts and improving existing conditions, and where necessary to establish the coordination infrastructure or instrument for the UfM R&I capacity building and research infrastructure cooperation.

The UfM Platform on R&I agreed on drafting an **Implementation Plan** that could envison the development of these priorities at programme level. A working group was set up with several members of the Platform Bureau, where the main task was to discuss and propose an implementation plan and a set of instruments at the regional and national levels that could be used to implement the agreed priorities and R&I actions. The group has delivered on a concept note detailing a preliminary set of implementing modalities at the meeting of the Platform on 7 July 2021, on the basis of which the UfM platform on R&I mandated the Implementation Plan Group, to further expand the concept note in view of the upcoming Ministerial Conference on R&I on 27 June 2022. The draft Declaration includes a reference to the Implementation Plan in the perspective of mobilising resources including from national funding agencies and alignment of national-level policies including bilateral programs. The main purpose of this R&I Ministerial meeting will be to endorse the three R&I Roadmaps, as well as agree on their implementation.

This living document draws on the concept note on the implementation modalities validated by UfM Regional Platform on 7 July 2021. It is meant to describe the main pillars towards the implementation of the adopted roadmaps.

The upcoming Ministerial Meeting on R&I is expected to recognize the positive role of Science Diplomacy in enhancing regional cooperation in the Mediterranean while developing skills and promoting circulation of talents, especially in field of sustainable development where R&I play a prominent role. It is also expected to promote cross-cutting and enabling actions that facilitate the R&I Roadmaps, towards the knowledge-based societies deriving from the knowledge triangle comprising research, lifelong education and learning, and innovation based upon the shared vision of fundamental R&I values and principles, including the respect of the freedom of scientific research, to build and to foster reciprocal and mutual beneficial collaborations. It is also envisioned to promote innovation as a tool for building knowledge, skills, vocational training, careers and economic inclusion, towards healthier, resilient and secure Euro-Mediterranean societies.

Approach

Implementation is key to ensure that the agreed R&I 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 the 2030 Agenda. Therefore, the **objective of the proposed Implementation Plan** is to propose a framework for research

and innovation and capacity building collaboration in the priority areas, including the sub-thematic areas[3] identified. The process of implementation of the the roadmaps is considered as part of a whole process, that stared from prioritization phase leading to implementation phase.

This document presents and overview of the approach that should be adopted for the successful implementation of roadmaps. However, this document should be a living document that is suggested to be revised on bi-annual basis under the umbrella of the platform on R&I platform. The document aims at exploring possible instruments and cooperation modalities to implement and valorise the roadmaps, taking into consideration that all proposed instruments as well as national, regional and bilateral programmes have their own strategic agendas, as well as programming cycles. This document is therefore, meant to be adopted, maintained and bi-annually updated by the UfM platform on R&I and the UfM National Focal Points on Research and Innovation. The updated version will be made available on the Platform's page on the UfM Secretariat website.

In terms of the implementation instruments, the UfM platform on R&I highlighted the need to focus on existing initiatives, as well as considering new ones, wherever needed. 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 inclusive approaches[4].

The stakeholders[5] of the actions 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, networks of Universities and citizens), the socio-economic actors private sector (businesses and entrepreneurs), and decision makers (including governments at all levels), as well as international organizations, financial institutions and donors. Additionally, in order to ensure viability of the proposed implementation plan, there is an underlying need for greater alignment of national-level policies and programmes of the UfM Member States in the direction of the identified priorities and recommended actions in the field of R&I and with other UfM sectorial dialogues connected to the Roadmaps (such as climate change, energy, environment, water, and civil protection).

Needed Actions

The three roadmaps adopt a horizontal approach to integrated crisis management, whereby the interlinkages between the three R&I Roadmaps are emphasised. ***Thus,***

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[3] 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

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

implementation needs to adopt the same approach. In addition to the needed R&I actions, several *crosscutting issues* should improve collaborative transdisciplinary R&I activities that allow the development of human capital development. Additionally, in particular, the roadmaps identify interconnected impact domains between climate change, health and renewable energies in the Mediterranean countries, where those primarily include *water resources, ecosystems, food safety and security, health and human security.*

The expert group finalised the roadmaps by highlighting *the following overaching policy recommendations[6]:*

1. Significantly increase the exchange and circulation of knowledge and information in the three priority areas, together with the implementation of platforms for facilitating the availability and communication of timely and reliable data also accessible to stakeholders.
2. Promote demonstration of transdisciplinary projects on sustainable development in the Euro-Mediterranean Region.
3. Promote technology cooperation.

Several crosscutting aspects should improve collaborative transdisciplinary R&I activities that allow the development of human capital development i.e. fostering sustainability science addressing interactions between natural and social systems, digitalization and use of Artificial Intelligence , open science and open data that increases transparency and accelerates sharing of data and results as well as technology transfer, interoperability of transdisciplinary observatories. Although they are characterized by different impacts and expected risks, their combination converges on the pathway towards healthier and resilient societies and sustainable development and innovation promotion. Therefore, all of the topics for R&I identified by three priority areas represent key priorities for UfM. For the sake of clarity, they are here summarised:

1. Impact of water scarcity and drought in rural areas
2. Sustainable agricultural production
3. Biodiversity in changing climate
4. Improving the health emergency preparedness of UfM Member States
5. Establishing sustainable and resilient health systems able to answer the needs of the populations, in particular the most vulnerable
6. Overview and modelling of renewable energy scenarios, harmonised renewable energy   smart database and communication within UfM MS
7. Modernization of the electric power systems (Smart Grid, Smart Cities and local Renewable Energy generation)
8. Distribution system modernization (Energy Loss Management)
9. Advanced technologies, green hydrogen production, storage and infrastructures energy -stability towards stability in health systems, agriculture and food system and resilience in the context of climate change

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[6]   https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/2021-06-21_UfM-Platform_Theories-of-Change-and-IPs_and_Horizontal-Integration_Final-Version.pdf

10. General reliable data-collection, as well as - sharing and -communication for decision making
11. Qualitative data-collection about local (potential) crisis situations and gender specific issues for local interventions towards capacities
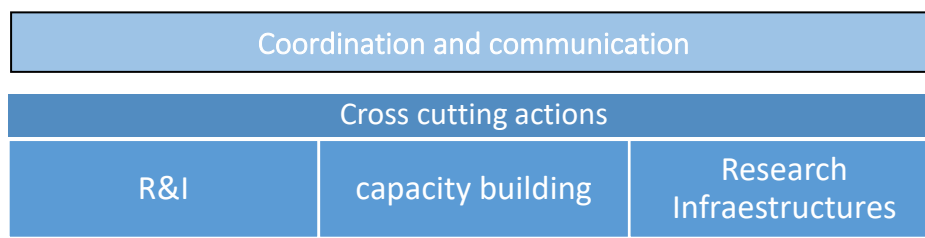
As per the adopted roadmaps, the experts additionally recommended concrete suggestions for action for R&I cooperation, capacity building, infrastructures/centers/platforms/frameworks, with the requirement of being inclusive with respect to the issues of all the three priority areas. Below are the main suggestions made by the expert group for the way forward. *However, it is well noted that* building on existing structures should be thoroughly explored prior to considering new *ones as recommended by the UfM R&I platform.*

1. Establish a network of greenhouse gases stations for decarboniszation and RE Strategy
2. Establish three joint long-term research centres addressing health, renewable energies, climate change
3. Establish a Mediterranean climate observatory and an index for climate change and sustainability
4. Establish a regional centre for epidemic preparedness and response in Southern Europe
5. Marie Curie Actions exclusively for young scientists in the region[7]
6. Establish a regional R&I programme in the priority areas implementation considering existing programmes and initiatives

Implementation Pillars

Based on actions described in the roadmaps, the following categories or types of actions should be considered:

- R&I actions
- Enabling and cross cutting actions and infrastructures
- Capacity building actions
- Coordination and communication actions

Coordination and communication		
Cross cutting actions		
R&I	capacity building	Research Infraestructures

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[7] The MSCA is open to all nationalities, and so the EC does not see the need for geographic calls. UfM suggested focusing on enhancing mobility actions at large.

Some of the actions could be directly undertaken and initiated by the UfM platform on R&I in coordination with the UfM Co-Presidencies (EC and Jordan), its Secretariat and Member States. Other actions need to be undertaken by existing programmes or funding bodies. Thus, following are the four proposed implementation pillars with defined time-schedule, as follows:

Pillar 1: Mapping/Portfolio Analysis of EUROMED R&I Cooperation
Timeframe: short-term 6 months

Following the R&I platform recommendation in terms of building on existing initiatives prior to developing new ones, the objective of this pillar is to map and analyse the existing EUROMED R&I cooperation portfolio in order to allow for building on existing knowledge, capturing potential for synergies and avoiding duplication. Thus, a search and mapping exercise will be carried out, where the search strategy will by design address indistinctly all parts of the Horizon Programmes, allowing to capture projects and results; as possibly enhance the competitive advantage of the region's existing R&I at geopolitical level. Because the Framework Programmes can provide only part of the R&I solutions, the search strategy will be open to other EU programmes mentioned under pillar 2 of this document, as well as relevant UfM activities. The analysis should also identify gaps, bottlenecks and needs with beneficiaries, in order to improve future implementation.

Pillar 2: Integration of needed actions into existing programmes
Timeframe: Ongoing action- biannual

This pillar is the key pillar in the implementation plan. The needed R&I and capacity building actions should be officially transmitted by the UfM platform on R&I to the funders/owners of the existing programmes at EU and UfM Member States level (through the National Contact Points), according to their programming cycle; and in a timely manner exploring possibility of integration of needed actions into existing programmes. For example, Horizon Europe has a biannual programming cycle while EU partnerships such as PRIMA use annual programming (Annual Work Plans). This should be a regular ongoing action, where the implementation plan should be updated based on how far the needed actions are being reflected under the existing programmes. The continuation of actions needs to be specifically assessed and addressed in the appropriate fora before any decision is taken.

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

- **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, potentially through a Mediterranean Initiative in Work Programme 2023-2024.

- **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 programme supporting education, training, youth and sport in the Union with an important international dimension.
- **Global programmes.** For example the GloPID-R (Global Research Collaboration for Infectious Disease Preparedness).
- **Regional Partnerships** These are based on co-funding mechanisms and prioritisation of variable geometry. They have shown to be successful in the region. An example is PRIMA (Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area) supported by the H2020 framework programme.
- **Bilateral programmes.** These are the programmes, which are implemented between two UfM 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.

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, including the new EU Missions[8]; PRIMA calls addressing agri-food systems, water, and their interlinkages under changing climate conditions, including their connections with Energy and Health. Moreover, the Mediterranean dimension of the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership and the Mediterranean lighthouse of Mission 'Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030' will offer an important framework for marine cooperation.
- **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"[9]
- **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

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[8] https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe_en

[9] 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

Sustainable Development Goals. The 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).

__UfM Secretariat. The secretariat will retain a general coordination role concerning implementation activities mentioned in the Roadmaps and in the UfM Ministerial Declaration on R&I, while ensuring consistency with other UfM dialogues. Additionally, horizontal activities such as regional dialogue, networking, awareness raising and capacity building could be implemented through UfM Secretariat's work programme. In order to ensure coordination between funders and funding instruments in the region as well as engagement of national funders, communication will be initiated and guided by UfM Platform on R&I, while coordination of this communication will be maintained by the UfM Secretariat.__

Pillar 3: Stakeholders' Communication and coordination R&I platform in the region
Timeframe: This is a short-term action (1 year)

For the coordination of knowledge management, communication concept is key and needs to be developed, also through a sustainable and flexible Knowledge Management and Communication Framework (KMCF), for multi-stakeholder dialogues and learning beyond short-term projects or programmes in the region. The proposed structure should benefit from the EU platforms/clusters, as well as build on already existing platforms in the region. The operative structure, should start from already existing partnership platforms in the frame of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. All relevant existing network/structures in the region should be invited to join this platform. Short-term knowledge management and communication instruments, like websites, data bases and some temporary stakeholders' processes, could be linked or transformed into a long-term cooperation infrastructure. The framework would be a part of a suggested coordination infrastructure for the cooperation in the UfM countries in the field of R&I. This is a short term (1 year) action that needs to be initiated by the UfM platform on R&I seeking engagement of UfM Member States and programme funders. There should be proper assessment in order to avoid duplication with existing platforms (e.g. Mediterranean Blue Economy Stakeholder Platform).This is a much-needed infrastructure that should include:

- Clustering network process to improve the exchange between experts in the three priority areas
- Cluster mechanism for a regular exchange between scientists and decision makers for the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)
- Networking process for Data & Knowledge Managers, including interfaces development of existing data bases
- Upcoming calls, information about opportunities from R&I instruments indicated in Pillar 2, including from relevant UfM-supported initiatives and UfM-labelled projects.
- Connect with knowledge bases, reports and resources.

Pillar 4: Monitoring and Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

Timeframe: MEL framework in place - This is a short term action (1 year)
Mid-term evaluation - 5 years
Impact analysis -10 years

The purpose of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning is to check the progress of implementation of the roadmaps and to assess effectiveness and impact. Key activities in monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment of the R&I Partnership will therefore be related to the establishment of proposal log-frame, with its designated top priorities, strategic outputs, outcomes and impact previewed in the Impact Pathways.

Monitoring of the progress of the implementation plan as well as the update of recommended actions in policies, programmes, instruments and projects is key in the implementation of in the established priorities. The implementation of the priorities would certainly benefit from a proper evaluation and impact analysis after a period of time while following a learning concept. Therefore, a MEL framework should be put in place by the UfM platform on R&I involving the UfM Member States in close collaboration with UfM Secretariat. The framework needs to be officially communicated to all relevant stakeholders, where such a framework will greatly support the alignment and coordination of actions towards common goal.