

# The Future of Higher Education in the Mediterranean

## The Student's Perspective

**MSS**  
Mediterranean Student Summit  
**2023**

from the 2nd Mediterranean Student Summit  
20th-22nd of September 2023

## Acknowledgements

The **Future of Higher Education in the Mediterranean** was developed from the conclusions drawn by the students participating in the 2nd Mediterranean Student Summit. The event took place from the 20th to 22nd of September at Abdelmalek Essaâdi University in Morocco. For UNIMED and ESN, it is imperative to encourage student engagement in participatory processes. By participating to the student summit, students take centre stage in developing recommendations for a better future.

This large edition was made possible thanks to the contribution of many partners, along with the sponsorship of the European Investment Bank Institute, the contribution of the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF), and the contribution of the hosting university (Abdelmalek Essaâdi University); moreover several member universities covered the costs of their students participation and, in some cases, also sponsored the participation of a Southern Mediterranean student.

### Special thanks to:

University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, France  
University of Strasbourg, France  
IULM University, Italy  
University of Padova, Italy  
University of Pavia, Italy  
An-Najah National University, Palestine  
Palestine Technical University, Palestine  
University of Barcelona, Spain  
University of Murcia, Spain  
University of La Manouba, Tunisia  
Bogazici University, Turkey

### Authors (in alphabetical order per institution):

Yassin Khalil - Liaison Officer for Africa and the Middle East, ESN  
Sara Tagliabracci - Global Mobility Coordinator, ESN  
Arianna Barletta - Junior project manager, UNIMED  
Anne-Laurence Pastorini - Project manager, UNIMED

### Revision:

Rita Dias - President of ESN AISBL;  
Neli Kalinova - Education and Youth Coordinator, ESN  
Marcello Scalisi - Director of UNIMED

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## Executive Summary

The challenges faced by students in the Mediterranean region are diverse, as the region itself is characterised by a multitude of perspectives, backgrounds, and realities characterising the region's various countries. Such challenges are related to key themes, including the internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions, governance, inclusion (with a focus on

gender dimensions), digital education, and greening/sustainable development. During the Mediterranean Student Summit, the students conducted a deep analysis of those challenges. This paper is a reflection on the conclusions drawn by the MSS students, offering recommendations that may inspire a political change and setting the tone for changes in the region.

### Keywords

*Mediterranean  
Students  
Higher Education  
Policy Change*

# 1 Introduction

During the period stretching from the 20th-22nd September 2023, the 2nd Mediterranean Student Summit, involving students from across the Mediterranean region, was held in Tangier, hosted by the Abdelmalek Essaâdi University, thanks to a collaboration between UNIMED (Mediterranean Universities Union) and ESN (Erasmus Student Network). The second edition followed the pilot summit held at the University of Barcelona on 1-2 November 2022, presented during the [UNIMED General Assembly in Amman](#), in June 2022. Out of the 31 students selected by ESN and UNIMED, 25 students coming from 10 UNIMED countries (Egypt, France, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Palestine, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey), and 2 students from Ghana and Togo in their capacity of observers and representatives of All-Africa Students Union – AASU participated to the Summit. Unfortunately, 5 students could not attend for visa issue. The event aimed to bring Higher Education students from both shores of the Mediterranean together to foster intercultural dialogue and encourage student engagement. This event was made possible thanks to the financial support of UNIMED institutional partners and university members eager to support student empowerment.

This collaboration has evolved over the years where UNIMED and ESN have jointly established an initiative named the 'Mediterranean Student Summit' as of 2022, and UNIMED has been working to establish this student summit as an annual event of the UNIMED calendar, like its General assembly. The summit aims to make the youth voice heard by stakeholders, as well as upskill these future leaders and turn them into multipliers and let them share what they have learned once they return home.

UNIMED and ESN advocate for increased mobility opportunities for students from both shores of the Mediterranean and a greater student and alumni engagement in South Med, as a core priority for both organisations. The key objectives of the event were that of increasing awareness and understanding amongst students from the Mediterranean region, supporting the development of skills that help them work together on societal challenges and establishing meaningful connections.

The specific outcomes were set out:

- Coming up with specific ideas in relation to the key themes of the event to be discussed with universities' leadership, international organisations, and other key stakeholders.
- Increasing the awareness among participants of existing opportunities such as International Credit Mobilities and turning them into multipliers that can support others at home.
- Laying foundations and gather insights from the participants on their needs and expectations to build long-term initiatives beyond the event.
- Fostering the long-term participation of students in international networks and initiatives.

With the Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Higher Education on the horizon, the Second Mediterranean Student Summit's ambition was to make the students reflect on the most significant challenges facing higher education across the Mediterranean and provide recommendations moving for the future. Therefore, this document presents the participating student' perspectives based on their discussions and activities during the 3 days of the Summit.

## 2 The Ministerial Conference on Higher Education

Cooperating strategically for more than 15 years according to the principles of diversity and dialogue, the Union for the Mediterranean is the main entity responsible for the organisation of the Ministerial Conference on Higher Education. This conference, the first one dedicated to Higher Education under the umbrella of the UfM, had been planned to be held in Fès in November 2023 but was then postponed to a date still to be defined. The main goal of the Ministerial Conference is to lay the foundations for renewed regional cooperation in higher education, guiding policymakers and institutions in setting clear priorities for cooperation.

By pursuing the shared goal of supporting Mediterranean students, [ESN's](#) cooperation with the [UfM](#) was solidified through a Memorandum of Understanding signed during a [Conference on Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications](#), in Barcelona on 12 April 2019 and with [UNIMED](#) through a Memorandum of Understanding signed during the UNIMED WEEK IN BRUSSELS in 2019. This was driven by their mutual interests in youth topics, particularly concerning quality education, employment, representation, educational exchanges, and student mobility.

Following an online consultation launched by the Secretariat of the UfM in December 2022, UfM has published [a consultation report](#). This report tackled key challenges across six themes: internationalisation of higher education institutions, governance, inclusion (including the gender dimension), digital education, Fundamental academic values and greening/sustainable development. An additional seventh theme considered in the consultation was employability, due to the widespread and high rate of unemployment among youth in the Mediterranean. A group of

103 stakeholders have been consulted, primarily from institutional and academic backgrounds.

The 'Future of Higher Education in the Mediterranean' report presents the findings of the II Mediterranean Student Summit and elaborates on the priorities outlined in the public consultation conducted by UfM, as detailed in the public consultation report. The document is divided into two main sections: the first section highlights the challenges faced by students in the Mediterranean region, while the second section proposes recommendations, from a student perspective, to address these challenges.

The consultations and the Ministerial Meeting will contribute to the drafting of the UfM Ministerial Declaration on Higher Education, which hopefully will be presented in the next edition of the Ministerial Meeting.

Discussions during the Mediterranean Student Summit also focused on international mobility and the obstacles faced by students both before departure and during their stays abroad. The challenges identified by students often mirrored their own experiences at the summit, with particular attention given to visa procedures and management, which frequently hindered student mobility for unjustifiable reasons. Furthermore, universities facilitated a discussion regarding the promotion of student activism in the region. The establishment of a dedicated group of committed and proactive students in the southern Mediterranean could foster information exchange and potentially enhance the region's appeal as a destination for studying abroad and other mobility opportunities.

## 3 Challenges faced by the students

### 3.1 Internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions

#### 3.1.1 Lack of internationalisation culture: low rate of mobility exchanges due to prejudices and safety issues

Prejudices about some countries – especially in the South Mediterranean – reduce the amount of students who are willing to make an experience abroad due to cultural religious prejudices, and a lack of knowledge of these countries.

Moreover, some regions are also experiencing ongoing conflicts inside the country and with other regions. The issue of not being perceived as an attractive destination impacts the development of a comprehensive internationalisation strategy aimed at making South-Mediterranean Universities more appealing. Additionally, students from both the North and South

shores of the Mediterranean face challenges related to the access to the information about mobility and international opportunities. Prospective students struggle to find reliable sources of information, and incoming students in particular face difficulties in identifying clear points of contact within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and among student groups when arriving from abroad. Regrettably, internationalisation at home is not considered as a main focus for many Universities, leading to a lack of opportunities for students to engage in internationalisation activities on campus.

#### 3.1.2 Visa issue

In the Mediterranean region, bureaucracy in higher education presents a big challenge for both students and institutions: the diverse cultures and languages in this region often result in complex administrative procedures, making it hard for international students to navigate the immigration system. Additionally, varying regulations and requirements across Mediterranean countries further complicate the process, causing delays and uncertainties for aspiring students. Undeniably, to ensure the participation of learning mobility for all students, especially for non-EU students, in the majority of cases, it is essential to be equipped with a passport and a visa. Even in the case of the Mediterranean Student Summit, despite support from UNIMED and the hosting university, unfortunately, 4 Libyan students and 1

Jordanian student with Iraqi citizenship could not attend the Student Summit because their visas were denied.

From a student of the MSS: “...the visa problem was severe. My home institution did not have any idea about visa applications and submitted my information too late, so I went through a lot of hassle applying for a visa and trying to get it to Vienna.”

These challenges are a result of a lack of clarity, of the complexity to collect all supporting documents required for a student, and poor guidance in visa processes, often accompanied by the impossibility to access to all the procedural information with high waiting times, and a lack of digitalised processes.

# Challenges

### 3.1.3 Lack of a streamlined flow of information and few student-led initiatives on campus

Mobility programmes, which include study abroad opportunities and internships, are essential for fostering cross-cultural understanding and enhancing academic experiences and have a positive impact on the reputation of the Universities and the mobility destination. Nevertheless, the lack of information on mobility programmes and the absence of student-led initiatives pose significant challenges within the education system, hindering the overall development and global exposure of students. One of the primary issues contributing to the lack of participation in mobility programmes is the limited awareness among students: many students may not be aware of the existence, benefits, or application procedures of these programmes. Scarce infor-

mation can lead to missed opportunities for personal and academic growth. Moreover, HEIs sometimes struggle to convey information about mobility programmes to their students effectively. Insufficient promotional efforts and the absence of clear communication channels widen to the information gap. As a result, students may not fully understand the potential advantages of participating in such programmes, further proving the importance of establishing more student-led initiatives on campus. Beyond the communication issue, another very important concern raised by the students is related to the selection process of participants in international mobility opportunities and how to improve it.

## 3.2 Governance

### 3.2.1 The bureaucracy hurdle

When establishing an initial dialogue with the participants, it was asked what was the biggest challenge in participating in international exchange programmes, and the answer was precisely bureaucracy, in all its facets: slow administrative procedures, a complicated infrastructure, documents available only in the language of the destination country, etc. It is crucial, then, to take into account the needs that students from non-EU countries presently

have when trying to access mobility, such as receiving support to fulfil visa requirements. In the most recent preliminary report of the [XV ESN Survey](#), the biggest research project on student mobility released by ESN, 10.98% of students reported that they faced administrative problems during their mobility period abroad, in relation to residence permit, visa, registration, etc.



### 3.2.2 Unclear strategy of credit recognition

One of the primary challenges in credit recognition is the diversity characterising academic systems across institutions and countries. Different grading scales, course structures, and evaluation methods can make it difficult to align and compare the academic achievements of students participating in mobility programmes. While some countries have adopted the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), thus facilitating seamless credit transfers and academic recognition within the European Higher Education Area, others have developed their own credit systems tailored to their specific educational frameworks. These diverse systems often pose challenges for students who wish to pursue education in different South Mediterranean coun-

tries, as credit recognition policies differ widely, leading to complexities in transferring credits between institutions. The absence of standardised procedures for credit recognition generates a hurdle for both students and academic institutions. Without clear guidelines and criteria, there may be inconsistencies in how different institutions assess and recognise the credits earned within the framework of mobility programmes. The lack of credit recognition had been previously identified as a challenge by the students of the Southern Mediterranean countries highlighted in the study conducted by UNIMED for the Union for the Mediterranean, [The Internationalisation of Higher Education in the Mediterranean, Current and Prospective Trends](#).

## 3.3 Inclusion

### 3.3.1 Cultural differences

There can be significant cultural and religious barriers that deter students from taking part in mobility exchange programmes. Cultural and religious stereotypes impact on how students from both sides of the Mediterranean perceive each other. Gaining knowledge of a new culture and engaging with people from different cultural backgrounds are

among the strongest motivations (69%) for non-mobile students to participate in mobility, according to both the XV ESN-survey preliminary report and the previously mentioned study on internationalisation of Higher Education. Mobility experiences allow students to experience new cultures and, in turn, understand alternative perspectives.

# Challenges

## 3.3.2 Financial barriers

Significant deterrents to inclusion are students' lower socio-economic backgrounds as regards their access to higher education and, even more, their access to internationalisation opportunities. Financial barriers represent a particularly significant challenge for students when engaging in internationalisation activities. Economic and political instability in some South Mediterranean countries can contribute to financial uncertainties. Individuals may be hesitant to commit to mobility programmes due to concerns about economic downturns, currency devaluation, or political unrest, which can impact their ability to cover expenses. The absence of a robust infrastructure for financial support, including financial counselling services and guidance on financial planning and expectations according to the mobility destination, can leave people feeling unsupported when trying to fully understand the financial aspects of mobility programmes fully. Limited access to funding opportunities is a major barrier, quoting the XV Survey

report: *ICM mobilities (N = 1,272) report a higher percentage of those not knowing about whether they received a top-up grant (15%), a lower amount of grants for disadvantaged backgrounds (1%).* Many students and professionals in the South Mediterranean may face challenges to secure scholarships, grants, or financial aid to support their participation in mobility programmes. Indeed, the scarcity of financial resources can deter individuals from making international experiences. There are significant costs involved in the process aimed at obtaining a visa, in addition to transportation, accommodation, and living expenses that can be prohibitively high. Accommodation costs can be a significant financial burden, particularly in regions where affordable housing options are limited. High living expenses can make mobility programmes financially inaccessible for many individuals, especially those with limited financial means. Clearly, these barriers disproportionately impact on students from underprivileged backgrounds.

## 3.3.3 Lack of communication and linguistic problems

There is a widespread lack of information and universities struggling to talk about student exchanges or opportunities to do research abroad. ICM students report in the XV ESNSurvey to be less satisfied with the linguistic support provided. This data highlight the need to continuously

improve the delivery of these services at both home and host universities. Language barriers are the cause of numerous misunderstandings and the consequence of little communication between students and HEIs.

## 3.4 Digital Education

### 3.4.1 Unorganised IT infrastructure and low digital literacy

Many countries in the South Mediterranean region face challenges in developing and maintaining a robust digital infrastructure. Limited access to high-speed internet, especially in rural areas, can prevent the adoption of digital technologies. There is a significant digital divide within the region, with disparities in access to technology between urban and rural areas, as well as between different

socioeconomic groups. A lack of digital literacy and skills among the population poses a substantial challenge. Moreover, while digital content is often created and designed with a global audience in mind, the South Mediterranean region may face challenges related to the localisation of content in different languages and cultural contexts; this can impact on the relevance and accessibility of digital services.

### 3.4.2 Few e-learning and peer exchange platforms

Economic challenges, including limited financial resources and investment in technology, can slow down the pace of digitalisation. Limited access to affordable digital devices, such as smartphones and computers, can be a barrier to digital inclusion. The cost of devices and their maintenance may prevent some segments of the population from fully participating in the digital economy. Nevertheless, COVID-19 was an opportunity to develop a more structured online learning environment, which, however, is accessible only a limited amount of students who can virtually engage in col-

laboration with peers studying in other higher education institutions around the world. However, in the cases in which such structure exists, it is limited to the virtual mobility experience only, without encouraging physical or blended mobility, in which we deem better for gaining many more skills and benefits can be gained personally and professionally. This is also related to limited resources to allow students to flexibly develop their linguistic and soft skills outside of the classroom and go out of their comfort zone, meeting people from different cultures.

# Challenges

## 3.5 Greening, sustainable development

### 3.5.1 Are HEIs environmentally sustainable?

The Mediterranean region is particularly vulnerable to climate change. Rising temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, and increased frequency of extreme weather events pose threats to agriculture, biodiversity, and coastal areas, affecting the livelihoods of communities. Moreover, as we know, the Mediterranean involves numerous countries with diverse cultures, languages, and geopolitical contexts. Collaborative efforts for sustainability require effective cross-border cooperation, but political tensions and historical conflicts can prevent joint initiatives.

Indeed, feedback received from students pointed to a lack of knowledge on greening and sustainability topics, with a lack of formal learning in this topic. It is challenging for students to understand why sustainability is important globally, how it affects the Mediterranean in particular, and how to take action to raise awareness and ensure the Universities have a sustainable environment. A challenge posed to universities is that there is a lack of campus initiatives to foster a green mindset within the university.

## 3.6 Employability

### 3.6.1 Limited access to job opportunities

Quoting the UfM Annual Report: "Currently, some 30% of people with third-level education in the region are unemployed, which is higher than those without it", indeed, high levels of unemployment and underemployment are common challenges for young graduates in the Mediterranean. What emerged from the consultation with the students was that nepotism can lead to unequal access to education, training programmes, and job opportunities. Young graduates from less privileged backgrounds may face greater barriers in securing positions, as corrupt practices

can influence admission processes and job placements. Corruption within educational institutions can compromise the quality of education. Issues such as academic fraud, bribery, and corruption in accreditation processes can affect the learning experience of young graduates, lowering the value of their qualifications. A challenge students face in this area is having a central point of contact, for example, a Career Office in their University, where students can access information and support regarding their future perspective and job.

### 3.6.2 Few opportunities to find a good job

In many Mediterranean countries, students struggle to find a job after they graduate. Commonly, lack of transparency can prevent students from getting a job: for many capable students, not having a good network of contacts can make it challenging to access relevant career opportunities. Limited opportunities for entrepreneurship and business development can constrain job creation. Barriers to starting and growing businesses, such as bureaucratic hurdles and lack of access to finance, can stifle entrepreneurship in the region. The mismatch between the skills acquired in university programmes

and the skills demanded by employers is a key challenge: some graduates may find that their academic qualifications do not align with the practical skills needed in the job market, leading to difficulties in securing employment. Networking is a crucial aspect of job hunting, and graduates in the Mediterranean may face challenges in building professional networks during their university years. Limited access to networking events, career fairs, and mentorship programmes can impact on graduates' ability to connect with potential employers.

# Challenges

# 4

## Recommendations

to boost internationalisation in the Mediterranean

### 4.1 Internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions

#### 4.1.1 Encouraging internationalisation of HEIs through exchange programmes

Fostering internationalisation in the Mediterranean region is a commitment that involves enhancing collaboration, cultural exchange, and educational mobility among countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. The goal is to create a more interconnected and globally engaged community that benefits from the rich diversity of the region. International Offices in the University should be the point of contact for home students seeking information on mobility opportunities, as well as onboarding and supporting incoming international and exchange students. Higher Education Institutions should indeed conduct more consultations with youth while facilitating exchanges and creating opportunities to promote the sharing of best practices. Facilitating student and faculty mobility through exchange programs and study-abroad initiatives can create opportunities for cross-cultural learning. Encouraging collaborative initiatives between

universities and research institutions in Mediterranean countries can enhance integration between students, and joint research projects, academic partnerships, and capacity-building training can facilitate the exchange of ideas and expertise, contributing to the overall development of the region. Such training events would allow both students and staff to feel more equipped to engage in internationalisation at home. Increased internationalisation at home provides a wider pool of students and staff the opportunity to reap its benefits. Moreover, students also asked for more flexible mobility programmes of shorter duration, particularly when there is no credit recognition (for instance for medical studies) and for a dedicated budget for mobility from their institution. Short-term mobility programmes are seen as more inclusive, as they constitute a way to involve students that might not be eligible, for several reasons, to classic study exchange programmes.

#### 4.1.2 Ensuring a streamlined process for international students through the creation of the “Erasmus visa”

Extensive research and knowledge, including data from the **ESNSurvey XV**, show that the visa issue is linked to a lack of administrative smoothness, national challenges, digital barriers that put additional burdens on international offices, as well as other related issues. Data from the ESN research show that students needing a visa for their learning mobility face far greater hurdles. Schengen visas

are not always granted to non-EU citizens for short-term exchange or movement purposes due to the aforementioned issues. Some potential breaches of the [EU's Directive 2016/801](#) are also mentioned, in relation to the conditions of entry and residence of students, researchers, and volunteers. That is why, to achieve universal mobility, one of the objectives of the European Education Area and the

# Recommendations

Strategic Framework, national and regional authorities need to become more involved in relevant aspects of student support. Depending on the Member State, youth action plans can provide a strong policy framework to facilitate visa issuance and increase opportunities for young people and youth organisations. It is highly recommended to encourage the standardisation of visa policies so that young students in all of its member nations will have a common and streamlined application process. It is also suggested to create unique visa classifications for various learning mobility initiatives, such as specific visa routes for education, internships, volunteer work, and exchange programs. It would be beneficial for young learners if these categories had less bureaucracy and more efficient application procedures. Having a standardised visa will reduce

the barriers students face: this should be destined only to projects related to international learning mobility, and it would facilitate things for students, who would not face any difficulties in getting it or would not miss the above-mentioned opportunities because of a lack of it, especially it will largely guarantee the return of students to their country and reduce the rate of illegal immigration. If this is not possible, Embassies and universities should still collaborate to smooth the processes and grant visas to all the students requesting them in order to allow them to start and complete their period of mobility without bureaucratic issues. This can constitute a digitalised, cost-effective, time-saving solution that will allow students to engage in both short and longer-term mobility opportunities.

### 4.1.3 Support the creation of student and alumni associations in the South Mediterranean

Investing in student organisations and dedicating some of the university budget to student organisations' activities of interest can enable them to further develop their skills outside of the lectures, create communities, and increase *internationalisation at home*. For higher education institutions to measure and evaluate the performance of degree programmes, it is important to gather student and alumni feedback: this is a relevant measure for quality control and for making sure that ensures universities can keep developing courses in line with student, employer, and community needs. This can be done by having trained student representatives for each course who can act as the liaison between students and faculty.

It was established that peer-to-peer collaboration between students from both shores can help Universities in the South Mediterranean and support already exist-

ing student structures while organising capacity-building and coordination activities, helping them interact with the university. That is why it will be important to share the experience of the ESN Sections model as an impactful student network to strengthen the existing student organisations and to encourage the dialogue between organisations and Universities. Moreover, ESN can offer support and guide students who are about to go to a country to study or work as interns and to share their experiences and tips. Universities should foster this process, providing support for the tutoring system, bureaucratic formalities, the search of accommodation, and linguistic support while connecting ESN Sections to students and Alumni to make this group more helpful and create a community of practice. As for UNIMED, it could encourage the universities to strengthen the student organisations and their connection

with university services. Having people from different backgrounds helping each other will also encourage students to start and complete a mobility period and not feel discouraged when having to deal with tons of bureaucracy, and reduce the impact of prejudices that arm them. The creation and implementation of specifically tailored programs and policies for the departing student for the entirety of their mobility, cultural, and intercultural preparation before the departure towards the reintegrations should be ensured by Higher Education institutions. Students should be provided with relevant information and support from sending HEIs about insurance, visas, credit recognition, linguistic support, learning agreement preparation, application preparation, and

general mobility information. The significance of returning students' participation in alumni communities should also be emphasised. Additionally, Universities should also create anonymous student/alumni feedback forums and conduct surveys to gain a better understanding of program performance. Indeed, Universities must foster safe spaces for students to provide feedback or voice their opinions on different topics. For students to be able to give feedback effectively, it is important to train them in the areas of empathy, diplomacy, and effective communication. With the right training, students can effectively voice their opinions on different topics, providing alternative views whilst being able to sympathise and engage in a dialogue with stakeholders.

## 4.2 Governance

### 4.2.1 Overcoming bureaucracy while adapting existing platforms to support internationalisation in the Mediterranean

The participants widely agreed on how challenging it is to access information related to international mobility at the moment. This constitutes a barrier to taking part in mobility opportunities like Erasmus+, but also, in general, to engaging in transnational collaboration among students. There was a clear agreement among participants regarding the importance of providing accessible information through centralised platforms. Digital tools and platforms such as the [Erasmus+ App](#) and the [Erasmus Generation Portal](#) (ESN's key mobility promotion platform) can be further enriched with information about South Mediterranean countries. Adapting these tools, including useful information regarding mobility in the South Mediterranean, could be an important development. The platform should be translated into the languages spoken in

the Mediterranean and should include informations on scholarships, internships, mobility opportunities, and so on. In order to facilitate such initiatives, institutions must have governance in place to enable students to form groups that can arrange activities of interest. There should be a space providing for information regarding countries (including on the security level in those countries) and Universities that people can access directly through links to information, which will also facilitate the work of Universities dealing with students. Talking about the management of international opportunities, in addition to strengthening communication and information on all existing opportunities, universities are also encouraged to define clear selection procedures and committees, which ensure that the selection is as transparent and fair as possible.



## 4.2.2 Ensuring credit recognition through a standardised ECTS system

In line with the [UfM public consultation report](#), it is worth highlighting that the standardisation and recognition of curricula and diplomas are essential in facilitating internationalisation on students level. Universities must be given the tools and support from international bodies and relevant membership organisations to implement a common framework locally to ensure its implementation, in a practical manner. Indeed, Institutions that adopt flexible approaches to credit recognition are better equipped to accommodate the diverse experiences gained during mobility programmes. As stated in the [International Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas, and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European States bordering on the Mediterranean](#), collaborative efforts at regional and international levels are needed to foster to the development of guidelines and frameworks that promote consistency and transparency in credit transfer processes. Indeed, the adoption of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) in the South Mediterranean region can bring about numerous advantages for higher education institutions, students, and the overall academic community. Implementing standardised ECTS credit

allocation across universities would ensure transparency in credit transfer and consistency in recognition processes. In addition to this, it is worth pointing out the existence of websites such as the [ERIC \(European Network of Information Centres in the European Region\)](#), and [NARIC \(National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union\) network](#), where information can be found and analysed regarding national authorities in charge of higher education issues in the Mediterranean. Moreover, mention should be made of other initiatives such as [Erasmus + project MERIC-NET](#) aiming at revamping the MERIC network (Mediterranean Recognition Information Centres) to favour and increase the recognition of qualifications within the Mediterranean Region. To conclude, a willingness to assess learning outcomes rather than focusing solely on course equivalencies can contribute to a more inclusive and effective credit recognition system: establishing clear guidelines, fostering communication between institutions, and promoting a flexible and student-centred approach to credit recognition can enhance the overall effectiveness of mobility programmes aimed at contributing to students' academic and personal development.

## 4.3 Inclusion

### 4.3.1 Improving facilities and reintegration activities after the mobility experience

Training social inclusion and intercultural dialogue has proved to be a key enabler for students who need to challenge the biases they have. This is, in part, a result of engaging in dialogue with people from different cultures, backgrounds, and needs (as demonstrated by the Mediter-

anean Student Summit). For students to feel able to fully participate in university life, it is important to provide inclusive facilities that cater to the needs of students from all backgrounds. Inclusive facilities include but are not limited to

- Safety point for students to be accom-

- panied out from campus to local public transport - particularly late at night;
- Dedicated support for students with learning difficulties;
- Accessible buildings with ramps, elevators, and electric doors.

Organising events/sessions at Universities' or HEIs' premises that promote learning mobility will help to increase a culture of exchange in students and its benefits on a personal and professional level. Only with the help of the institutions there will be a real dissemination of the work that has been done and the creation of an impact on society. Provi-

### 4.3.2 Overcoming financial barriers

Addressing financial barriers requires a major involvement and collaboration between educational institutions, governments, international organisations, etc. Efforts should focus on creating programmes that are more sustainable from a financial point of view and on improving access to information on available funding sources in order to make sure that everybody in the South Mediterranean can fully participate in and benefit from mobility programs. A concrete solution to this would be to advocate for increased national and international co-funding for a wide range of mobility programmes

### 4.3.3 Ensuring that multilingualism is viewed as an advantage rather than an obstacle

The Mediterranean region is characterised by linguistic diversity: promoting language learning and multilingualism can serve as a bridge for communication and collaboration. Educational institutions should offer language courses that reflect the linguistic wealth of the region, encouraging students to learn and appreciate languages different than their own. Additionally, strict language requirements can constitute a significant financial barrier to mobility: students are required to pay significant fees when sending an application without a guarantee of suc-

cess. That is why it is recommended to allocate enough funds to international students to cover the translation of their enrollment documents (especially needed for ICM students). This, alongside proof of sufficient funds and the requirement to obtain relevant external qualifications such as TOEFL1 to prove their English language skills, adds up to the expenses that the pre-departure student has to cover, and the university does not support that. A free, commonly recognised digitised language certification for students could solve said problem.

ding students with more information will also help solve many of the problems that Mediterranean students have today. Indeed, data from the XV ESNsurvey illustrates that the service with the highest level of dissatisfaction is "Reintegration Activities", with the lowest score of 22.95% dissatisfaction and 38.11% of "not applicable" responses. Results in terms of Alumni community engagement after returning home were very close to the overall results on reintegration activities, indicating that home institutions need to work hard in the area of reintegration in those domains.

(including short mobilities) between North-South and South-South Mediterranean countries. Ensuring that there are financial mechanisms in place to allow the students from lower socio-economic backgrounds can be transformational and can enable the students to develop key skills valued in the workplace and seize better career opportunities. Moreover, it is highly recommended to have tailored financial support for visas, housing, and anything that falls within the category of possible expenses one may incur before departure.

## 4.4 Digital Education

### 4.4.1 Boosting the IT infrastructure and supporting digital literacy

A key solution would be that of prioritising the IT infrastructure investments on campus; the students recommend the adoption of a network similar to [Eduroam](#) across the region (European university wifi network). Moreover, with the shift to on-line learning during the pandemic period followed by a mix of digital and in-person teaching, it is important to make sure that

staff and students will use the technology required to both learn and teach effectively, as well as facilitate educational teaching advancements. Investment in digital learning tools and providing training for optimal use for both staff and students can significantly enhance the learning experience for all.

### 4.4.2 Virtual mobility: a complement and not a substitute for physical exchange

Boosting the use of e-learning platforms would allow students to have access to content and materials that can help them significantly improve their skills, e.g., language and soft skills, and better prepare them for the labour market. Furthermore, said platforms could be used together with peer exchange platforms, thus allowing the students to learn whilst engaging with students from different

backgrounds, enhancing their learning experience. However, as regards international learning mobility, as ESN pointed out in a joint position paper with the European Students' Union (ESU): "[Bringing the student perspective to the debate on mobility, virtual exchange & blended learning](#)", virtual mobility should always act as a complement rather than a substitute to physical exchange.

## 4.5 Greening & Sustainable development

### 4.5.1 Ensuring HEI environmental sustainability

Educational programs should be implemented at all levels to raise awareness about environmental issues and foster a sense of responsibility among communities. HEIs integrating sustainability modules into the curricula can significantly enable students to gain competence and understand the importance of sustainability. This could be a cross-course initiative where students from different programmes can participate

in shared sustainability modules, allowing collaboration across subjects. Furthermore, local communities should be involved in sustainable development projects and conservation efforts to ensure their active participation. Funding for student-led environmental sustainability projects can be a big enabler for active participation in such causes. This could provide students with the necessary resources and offer them to put theory into

practice. Cross-programme collaboration can give students a wider community to work with while gaining practical experience in leading relevant projects. Launching campus initiatives such as re-

fillable water bottles, discounts related to the use of reusable cups from cafés, and a reduced use of single-use plastic can help foster an environment favourable to the spread of a green mindset.

# Recommendations

## 4.6 Employability

### 4.6.1 Strengthening University Career Offices

Career offices assist students in their search of a job by providing resources for finding job opportunities, helping students explore career paths, identifying their strengths and interests, and setting career goals. Students would benefit immeasurably from having a dedicated careers office that could help them exploring different career pathways. Additional services could include recommendations on how to write and tailor CVs as well as interview practice. Given the connection culture that exists in many countries, universities have an opportunity to build relationships with local companies and

create partnerships for their students to have access to jobs of interest and relevance that fit their skills and educational background. Furthermore, these partnerships could extend to short-term work experiences, shadowing and networking events, particularly focused on students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Engaging alumni who have a successful career could be a way to gather valuable insights and offer mentorship opportunities for current students. Building strong partnerships helps facilitate internship placements, job opportunities, and industry-specific events for students.

### 4.6.2 Fostering entrepreneurship through training

Entrepreneurship favours the development of key skills, such as leadership, and fosters economic growth in the local community. Integrating entrepreneurship education into academic curricula at all levels helps to nurture an entrepreneurial mindset from an early stage. Creating entrepreneurship programmes and offering facilities to test and develop ideas can equip graduates with the necessary skills to innovate in a concrete manner. Offering practical training programmes, workshops, and mentoring to enhance the skills necessary in the realm of entrepreneurship, including business planning, financial management, and

marketing. Moreover, it is crucial to foster collaboration and partnerships between entrepreneurs and students across Mediterranean countries to promote knowledge exchange and facilitate access to international markets. These such initiatives should focus especially on women entrepreneurs and those belonging to minorities, as they are the categories that are usually discriminated against when entering the job market. Targeted training programmes and mentorship opportunities should be developed to support the most underrepresented groups in the domain of entrepreneurship.



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