EDUCATION AS KEY SHAPING FACTOR OF A COMMON AND PROSPEROUS EURO-MEDITERRANEAN FUTURE: THE UNION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN’S PERSPECTIVE

UfM Secretariat

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) is an intergovernmental, Euro-Mediterranean organization that brings together all 28 countries of the European Union and 15 countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean. It aims to enhance peace, stability and shared prosperity in the Euro-Mediterranean region, through the promotion of inclusive and sustainable development.

The activities of the UfM – as an organization uniquely positioned to bridge and strengthen dialogue across the northern, southern, and eastern Mediterranean – address a broad spectrum of shared strategic issues in the region such as water, environment, higher education, research and innovation, among others. They notably contribute towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a crosscutting, results-focused, and consensus-based manner.

In order to fulfill this mission and promote inclusive and sustainable development in the region, the 43 UfM member states work on common agendas and portfolios of activities, on topics including higher education and environment. In particular, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and mobility play an essential role in achieving a positive agenda for youth in the Mediterranean. This is especially important in a region where almost 60 percent of the population is below the age of 30. In this context, the UfM works to guide and advance the member states’ education and ESD-related objectives across all of its thematic axis.

Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (MSESD)

ESD is at the core of the international and regional agenda and is the basis for sustainable consumption and behavioural change towards more sustainable lifestyles. These are goals that the UfM is deeply involved in and is currently promoting through targeted support. In pursuit of its mission and the will of its member states, the Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (MSESD) was endorsed by UfM Ministers responsible for environment and climate change issues, in Athens on 13 May 2014.

The Strategy was developed under the framework of the UfM as result of a participatory process involving experts from universities, governmental institutions, non-governmental and civil society organizations. It was coordinated by the University of Athens/UNESCO Chair and Network on Sustainable Development Management and Education in the Mediterranean, and supported by the Mediterranean Educational Initiative on Environment and Sustainability (MEdIES) of the Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE).

As education for sustainable development under the MSESD must take local, subnational, national and regional circumstances into account, it places varying degrees of emphasis on the different aspects of sustainable development depending on the country and the field of education. This Strategy will serve as a flexible framework for the countries of the region, given that the implementation of the MSESD is driven by countries’ priorities, initiatives and specific needs and circumstances.

In response to the UfM-endorsed MSESD, the Action Plan of the Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development was shaped and presented at the high-level Ministerial Conference held in Nicosia (Cyprus) on 8-9 December 2016. The Action Plan is a “new generation” instrument, which incorporates all major international commitments of the countries of the region related to ESD in a way that it can be easily followed by national administrations, reducing unnecessary overlaps and repetitions.

The Action Plan targets priority thematic issues – one of which is sustainable consumption and production patterns – regarding ESD and promotes the development of regional programs and activities, either independently or in partnership with others.

The Action Plan is directly related to the two major, relevant regional Mediterranean processes, namely: the Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development, under the UfM, as well as the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD) (2016-2025) of the Barcelona Convention, coordinated by the UN Environment Program/Mediterranean Action Plan...
(UNEP/MAP). The Action Plan integrates other relevant provisions deriving from international conventions and important international developments that have occurred since May 2014, including the Regional Action Plan on Sustainable Consumption and Production for the Mediterranean and its Roadmap for implementation, and promotes the achievement of the SDGs.

Global University Network for Innovation (GUNi)

The UfM also takes part in and supports the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNi), as a network currently composed of over 210 members from 78 countries, which includes the UNESCO Chairs in Higher Education, higher education institutions, research centers and networks related to innovation and the social commitment of higher education.

Following the collaboration initiated during the GUNi International Conference on Sustainable Development Goals: ‘Actors and Implementation’, held in September 2017, GUNi and the UfM Secretariat established a cooperation framework in 2018 for the upcoming three years. Here, they signed a memorandum of understanding aimed at continuing to work together in accordance to the mission and objectives of both institutions.

Under this partnership, the UfM Secretariat and GUNi co-organised a first meeting of the Group of Experts on Sustainable Development Goals and Higher Education, which aims to help higher education institutions, students and policymakers implement the SDGs, in synergy with the efforts undertaken within the Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development.

The UfM’s perspective on coordinated action for education in the Euro-Mediterranean region is underpinned by a holistic and interdisciplinary approach, fully in tune with the current and future complex environmental, economic, and social challenges facing the region. ESD is a key driver of positive change and an essential prerequisite for a sustainable and prosperous future in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Environmental education is a key element for ensuring that the new generations are aware of the sustainability needs of their region. Additionally, by mainstreaming environmental knowledge in curricula and specialized training, it could be easier to achieve a change of paradigm in economic growth through innovative small and medium-sized enterprises tackling environmental challenges as a way to achieve inclusive sustainable development.

Note: