

STRENGTHENING EURO-MED COOPERATION THROUGH SUSTAINABILITY, GENDER EQUITY, AND REGIONAL INNOVATION

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Inspiring **Knowledge** Driving **Action** Uniting **Cultures**

Executive Summary



This policy paper explores practical pathways for implementing sustainability principles within the Euro-Mediterranean region through inclusive, gender-sensitive, and cooperative approaches. Drawing from on-the-ground practices and expert insights, including innovative upcycling initiatives, gender mainstreaming strategies, and participatory research models, the paper offers actionable recommendations grounded in SDG 17. It argues for the establishment of concrete, dedicated institutions for Euro-Med sustainability cooperation and proposes intersectional, community-led frameworks as the way forward. We have concrete structures and plans on national and global level, but missing regional Euro-Med structures to monitor and support implementation of SDGs and sustainability in general.

Introduction



Introduction Sustainability in the Euro-Mediterranean region must address complex, interlinked challenges, including environmental degradation, social inequality, youth unemployment, and weakened civic space. While the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a universal framework, regional cooperation remains fragmented. The Euro-Med area requires mechanisms and institutions tailored to its specific geopolitical, ecological, and cultural dynamics.

This paper builds upon discussions held during the ALForum panel "**Driving Sustainability for Stronger Euro-Med Partnerships: Turning Principles into Action,**" and incorporates concrete experiences from civil society actors across the region. It reflects shared commitments to the SDGs while identifying key gaps in implementation, especially concerning intersectionality, gender equity, and participatory methods.

Approach & Results



The data and perspectives presented are rooted in localised action and regional collaboration.

Environmental and Economic Innovation: Irem Ebru Kuru, president of two NGOs in Türkiye, highlighted the transformative power of social enterprise and upcycling in engaging communities. Her association started by handcrafting goods to support stray animals and has since evolved into a structured social enterprise. The production of toys for children and animals using sewing machines is not only environmentally conscious but also economically empowering. Her organisation holds an official copyright and sells products under a registered brand, combining sustainability and social entrepreneurship. These initiatives have been supported through EU-funded volunteer programmes, creating a scalable model of civic participation and sustainable microbusiness.

Upcycling for Market Viability: Complementing Kuru's work, several projects runs hands-on workshops showing how waste materials can be transformed into attractive, saleable products. These workshops emphasize market relevance, guiding participants on product development, label creation, and marketing strategies. They incorporate digital tools and social media training, equipping participants with the skills needed to build and sustain their own circular economy-based businesses. These practices directly contribute to job creation, circular economy goals, and inclusive local economies and at the end support and pay for the community work which become self-sufficient.

Gender Mainstreaming as a Transformative Methodology: Samar Zughool, Director of Reka Si, emphasised that gender equality must not be treated as a separate or secondary issue but as a cross-cutting priority within all SDG frameworks. Drawing on participatory research with communities facing intersecting vulnerabilities, she demonstrated how surfacing gender-based barriers leads to targeted, effective policy responses. Her analysis indicated that most sustainability projects lack the tools to measure gendered impacts, which undermines their inclusiveness and long-term success.

Zughool introduced transformative safeguarding action plans developed by Reka Si. These plans were created in collaboration with marginalised groups and serve as living frameworks to turn systemic inequalities into cross-sectoral opportunities. The plans are iterative, action-oriented, and used as templates across different local initiatives—from environmental justice to community health.

She also addressed the ongoing contraction in international funding for feminist and grassroots movements. In response, she urged civil society to pursue self-financing mechanisms to preserve organisational autonomy. Her recommendation includes capacity-building for income-generating activities, local fundraising, and ethical social entrepreneurship. Moreover, she called for gender-responsive budgeting at institutional and donor levels, ensuring sustainable financing for equality initiatives.

Intersectional Monitoring and Advocacy: In her concluding remarks, Zughool challenged the dominance of quantitative indicators in Official Development Assistance (ODA) reporting. She recommended a move toward co-created indicators that reflect both qualitative lived experiences and statistical trends. This dual-track system, developed in partnership with communities, would enhance the reliability and impact of policy assessments, especially in contexts involving gender, migration, or poverty.

Recommendations from SOLIDAR & Others:

Complementing the insights of individual speakers, SOLIDAR's policy recommendations for the Euro-Med region underline the necessity of diverse partnerships. Their call to adapt global goals to local contexts, particularly through participatory design and bottom-up implementation, resonates strongly with the presented field practices. The Social Rights Monitor is highlighted as a vital diagnostic tool to benchmark social justice outcomes and track progress in real-time. The recommendations advocate for civic space protection, rights-based migration policy, and the alignment of sustainability efforts with human rights principles.

Policy Implications & Recommendations



The following recommendations aim to strengthen Euro-Med sustainability cooperation:

1. Establish Euro-Med Specific Institutions: Dedicated bodies for regional sustainability cooperation should be created to align localised efforts with global frameworks, grounded in SDG 17.

2. Integrate Gender Mainstreaming Systematically: Regional policy frameworks must include gender-sensitive indicators and prioritise the leadership of grassroots women-led organisations. Intersectionality should guide all policy design.

3. Promote Practical Education and Local Entrepreneurship: Support models such as upcycling workshops and enterprises to combine sustainability, economic empowerment, and community cohesion.

4. Ensure Participatory Policymaking: Involve local communities in designing, implementing, and monitoring sustainability programmes. Co-creation builds ownership and enhances effectiveness.

5. Build Regional Alliances: Facilitate platforms for collaboration among NGOs, trade unions, youth groups, and academic institutions from both North and South Mediterranean countries.

6. Secure Civic Space: Support legal reforms and advocacy initiatives that protect freedom of association and participation across the region.

7. Use Data Responsibly: Develop holistic monitoring systems combining quantitative metrics with participatory, qualitative evidence.

8. Enable Grassroots Financing: Introduce and scale funding models that ensure grassroots autonomy, such as community fundraising, ethical investment, and regional innovation funds.

9. Create Social rights monitoring system, such as SOLIDAR is doing in Europe.

Conclusion



To turn sustainability principles into real progress, the Euro-Mediterranean region must build inclusive, localised, and cooperative structures. Practical initiatives like upcycling, gender-equity plans, and evidence-based advocacy offer scalable models for regional transformation. This paper calls for a renewed commitment to SDG 17: strengthening partnerships for sustainable development through dedicated regional institutions, cross-sectoral action, and grassroots leadership.



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