

ACCELERATING FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

EXECUTIVE BRIEF

The 2021 UN Food Systems Summit brought together diverse actors from around the world to generate actions for more sustainable and equitable food systems. As part of this global effort, the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the One Planet Network's Sustainable Food Systems

Programme, and the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA) Foundation have convened two independent dialogues in 2021 to focus on the specificities of food systems across the Mediterranean, connecting 300 diverse stakeholders from over 30 countries, including ten Member State Dialogue Convenors. This brief builds on the dialogues' outcomes to highlight key messages on food systems in the Mediterranean.

KEY MESSAGES

- **Food systems transformation** is a key entry point to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its goals. While solutions exist, means to implement them are also needed in order to achieve successful sustainable results at scale.
- **Regional collaboration** is crucial to boost transformative actions towards more sustainable food systems in the Mediterranean, with the engagement of informed Mediterranean citizens and rural communities, for greater resilience to climate change and healthier diets.
- A Mediterranean **multi-stakeholder dialogue** is needed to identify common priorities based on scientific evidence and local knowledge, leveraging funds including public and private investments for a rethinking of food systems.
- The "**SFS-MED¹ Platform**", a **multi-stakeholder initiative** initiated by CIHEAM, FAO and UfM Secretariat, offers a forum to facilitate collaboration beyond the Summit, sharing a common approach to food systems transformation, mobilizing funds and fostering investments, capacities and innovation as a systemic response to the challenges hindering the region.²

Countries and populations across the Mediterranean are facing interdependent challenges linked to demographic changes, climate emergencies, and flows of food and people. These drivers are influencing food systems across the region through changes in consumption and production patterns, growing vulnerability of ecosystems and biodiversity, and widening gaps in people's livelihoods and food security.

Increasingly interconnected markets and value chains throughout the region are calling for healthier diets delivered through more sustainable food systems. The Mediterranean diet is recognized as a lever to bridge sustainable consumption and production, while reviving the historical, cultural and gastronomic heritage of the region.

WHAT TO TRANSFORM

- 1 Blue, green and circular economy** need to become pillars of a sustainable transformation. This entails investments in research and capacity building for more sustainable practices by small producers, entrepreneurs and consumers, adding value to food products and food residues, minimizing the footprint on natural resources from food production, processing and distribution systems.
- 2 Sustainable management of land and water resources** is key to climate change resilience. Key actions include creating incentives to adopt resilience solutions through cost/benefit analyses, mainstreaming the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems nexus in planning processes, reviving traditional farming systems and local knowledge, and scaling up grassroots responses to climate change effects on natural resources.
- 3 Mediterranean diet as a lever to bridge sustainable consumption and production.** This requires multi-stakeholder partnerships to sensitize about the health, sustainability and cultural dimensions of the Mediterranean diet, establish country/regional food labeling to address consumers' needs through standards of quality and sustainability.
- 4 Cities are drivers** of context-specific sustainable approaches and bottom-up engagement. Networks of cities have the potential to drive sustainable change towards local food policies with a focus on territorial systems and urban-rural linkages, where citizens are engaged in territorial planning and in shorter value chains, through digitalization and improved data availability and quality about local food systems.
- 5 Equitable and inclusive sustainable development of rural livelihoods.** Empowering youth, women and rural communities as agents of change leads to new approaches for the co-design of policies and actions for sustainable food systems. It requires the development of new skills and training and career pathways to ensure that the transition to sustainability creates decent jobs, stable enterprises, and access to markets.

¹Sustainable Food Systems in the MEDITerranean.

²The SFS-MED Platform is also an affiliated project within the One Planet Network, which has a mandate from heads of state (Rio+20 Conference) to promote Sustainable Consumption and Production in line with SDG 12 and as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

HOW TO TRANSFORM

1 Multi-stakeholder collaboration and partnerships for sustainable food systems

- ▶ A Mediterranean multi-stakeholder dialogue on sustainable food systems is needed to identify common priorities and strengthen regional collaboration, setting clear goals for a rethinking of food systems.
- ▶ Foster inclusive governance to provide room for countries from the Mediterranean region to engage in the co-ownership, co-management and co-funding of actions.
- ▶ Connect different networks and initiatives existing in the region under a common sustainable food systems perspective as a foundation for concerted action.

The SFS-MED Platform offers a forum for dialogue and collaboration on priority themes for sustainable food systems in the Mediterranean, acting as a neutral facilitator of multi-stakeholder exchange to enhance policy coherence, build trust, and promote effective implementation.

2 Leveraging public and private finance and investments for sustainable food systems

- ▶ Sustainable finance and investments promoting green, blue and circular economy principles are pivotal to build food systems stakeholders' capacities and willingness to embrace sustainability.
- ▶ Political agendas need to address the issue of underfunding of sustainable actions and promote policy reform that improve the investment climate to blend private/public finance for de-risking investments in small producers and entrepreneurs of the Mediterranean food systems.
- ▶ Development banks (national and international) need to be engaged as they play an important role in this interface.

The SFS-MED Platform offers an ideal setting to rebalance sustainability and finance. The co-creation of flagship projects and investment proposals will enable Mediterranean food systems' actors to access funding and scale up sustainable investments.

3 Building awareness and capacities for sustainable food systems transformation

- ▶ Food systems transformation starts locally, involving all stakeholders, who must be enabled to take decisions based on adequate knowledge, information and awareness.
- ▶ Effective capacity building needs to link researchers with producers, entrepreneurs, investors, civil society, and decision-makers, fostering behavioural change around food systems across the region.
- ▶ Engagement of women and youth is paramount to transfer skills and increase awareness of new generations, directly involving them in research and innovation projects to test solutions in real life, co-designing food systems' transition to sustainability through policy labs and local food councils.

The SFS-MED Platform offers a network for strengthening knowledge sharing and capacity building related to sustainable food consumption and production across the Mediterranean.

4 Research, data, and innovation to understand food systems and accelerate their transformation

- ▶ More ambitious funds and investments in research and innovation are needed, rewarding researchers who engage in applied research and market-oriented innovations.
- ▶ Bridging the gap between science, policy and business requires investing in specific competences and professional figures, such as innovation brokers, to facilitate an innovative ecosystem, connect with local needs, and enhance the transfer of knowledge from research centres to applied fields.

The SFS MED Platform can promote regional models for data sharing, science diplomacy, and advancement of green and blue, inclusive and digital innovation, to support the scaling up of sustainable investments.

This document was produced with financial assistance from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of FAO and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the Italian Government.



Some rights reserved. This work is available under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO licence