



2026 **ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT**

Simplification, Implementation & Enforcement

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for the Mediterranean*



1. Introduction

In line with the European Commission's commitment to delivering more effectively for citizens, as outlined in President von der Leyen's Political Guidelines, the Mission Letters addressed to the Commissioners and the Communication on a "A Simpler and Faster Europe"¹, this report details the activities undertaken under my responsibility as Commissioner for the Mediterranean and responsible for demography in relation to simplification, implementation and enforcement for the period from 1 August 2025 to 31 July 2026.

I am committed to using the opportunity that the Pact for the Mediterranean offers us and build together with our partners a true Common Mediterranean Space that secures our sustainable prosperity, security and resilience. My work continues to focus on fostering stronger, people-centred engagement with the southern Mediterranean and the Gulf countries, and building comprehensive partnerships. Simultaneously, I have contributed to facilitating EU Member States' efforts to address their demographic challenges.

Throughout this mandate, simplification, better implementation and competitiveness have remained the *fil rouge* of our actions, ensuring that our policies remain fit-for-purpose, evidence-based and better aligned with the realities on the ground. This report will be presented to the European Parliament and the Council.

2. Executive Summary

Simplification efforts in the area of EU relations with the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf have focused on procedural efficiency within the framework of Regulation (EU) 2021/947 (NDICI–Global Europe)². By shifting toward multiannual programming as the standard, we have enhanced project stability and reduced the administrative burden. Furthermore, we have progressively decentralised the management of certain areas of Directorate-General for the Middle East, North Africa, and the Gulf (DG MENA) programming (the process through which the EU defines and implements its medium and long-term international cooperation priorities) to EU Delegations to better tailor actions to local contexts, while simultaneously rationalising internal workflows. In the field of demography, the Joint Research Centre (JRC) has notably conducted a progress review of the initiatives under the Demography Toolbox and organised an [Implementation Dialogue](#) on the pillar relating to older people. These initiatives have inspired action in the area of longevity.

In turn, the implementation of our policy objectives in Mediterranean relations is driven by the [Pact for the Mediterranean](#), which is operationalised through a biannual Action Plan that ensures a flexible approach to regional cooperation and puts implementation at its centre. Significant progress has been made across several fronts, including by developing the MED Skills Tracker to improve regional labour market coordination and the formulation of the Mediterranean University initiative to enhance higher education mobility and opportunities in the region. To strengthen youth engagement, we are also launching the Youth Parliamentary Assembly. We also have published a [General Call for Expressions of Interest in MENA](#) to map EU private sector's investment in the region and help them scale up. Additionally, input from the [Implementation Dialogue on Investment in Renewable Energy](#), held on 9 June 2026, will feed directly into the implementation phase of the Trans-Mediterranean Renewable Energy and Clean Tech Cooperation Initiative (T-MED), proving crucial to its success.

¹ *A simpler and faster Europe: Communication on implementation and simplification*, COM(2025) 47 final, 11 February 2025, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52025DC0047>.

² Regulation (EU) 2021/947 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 June 2021 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe, available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A02021R0947-20260524>.

3. Delivering Results: Key Measures

A. Simplification and costs savings

Reducing the administrative and regulatory burden is essential to enhancing **EU competitiveness**. The policy and operational scope of my teams in DG MENA is focused on the implementation of NDICI–Global Europe, in coordination with DG INTPA and DG ENEST. In the spirit of simplifying the way we implement NDICI–Global Europe on our end, my teams in DG MENA have taken some significant steps in the past 12 months.

The most significant measure my teams have put forward in this regard during the reporting period has been to transition to **multiannual programming as the standard**. This significantly reduces the frequency of procedural renewals and the associated administrative burden for both the Commission and the Member States (Comitology), as well as for its partners in the MENA regions. Thanks to this new approach, DG MENA adopted 11 fewer Financing Decisions during the reporting period. This multi-year approach enhances predictability and project stability, allowing for more strategic resource allocation. By minimising the recurrent effort required to prepare, negotiate and adopt repetitive annual implementing acts, this approach optimises the operational management of our cooperation instrument and ensures a swift implementation of our programmes.

We have also started a **decentralisation of programme management**. A portion of the management of bilateral programming in key policy areas, such as migration, where possible, is being progressively transferred to EU Delegations. This decentralisation simplifies the design and conception of actions by placing the decision-making closer to the operational context. For example, five instances in which a delegation had to submit a standalone request to headquarters to process a transaction or operation have been eliminated, saving secretarial, initiating and verification staff in delegations time.

Internally my teams have also conducted a relevant **review of internal work procedures**. Since its establishment, DG MENA has systematically rationalised inherited procedures. Core measures taken up until today include eliminating physical document transfers with the delegations (e.g., local archiving of financing agreements), reviewing and standardising templates to remove redundancies and adopting simplified financing agreements where applicable. For instance, there has been a reduction in the number of provisions in the general conditions in financing agreements (19 instead of 28) by deleting obsolete processes. These changes reduce administrative burdens and expedite decision-making without compromising compliance or transparency, while liberating staff for other tasks requiring higher added-value.

B. Implementation and enforcement³

Building on the mandate entrusted to me by President von der Leyen, my services have worked across the various policy areas under my portfolio to ensure the efficient implementation and delivery of our strategic objectives. Guided by the principles of the Better Regulation agenda, we are committed to making our policies more accessible, targeted and effective for our partners and citizens. By prioritising co-creation and aligning periodically our actions with the realities on the ground, we ensure that our tools remain fit-for-purpose.

The Mediterranean

The [Pact for the Mediterranean](#) (the Pact) is our *feuille de route* for the upcoming years' Euro-mediterranean cooperation. The Pact was developed through an extensive and inclusive consultation process with governments, civil society, youth, private sector and researchers across the Mediterranean. As a result, over 100 initiatives were conceived, organised around three pillars, with the ultimate aim of building a Common Mediterranean Space that is prosperous, resilient and secure.

In order to operationalise the Pact, which is the framework, an Action Plan structured across the Pact's three pillars will be published twice a year. The [first iteration of this plan](#) was published on 17 April 2026 and presents co-designed, concrete and innovative actions mature for implementation. This is a living document, updated regularly (every 6 months), including with input from partners and lessons learnt; this ensures that the Pact's delivery stays on course while enabling swift and efficient implementation. This approach is underpinned by the principles of co-creation, co-ownership, mutual interest and joint responsibility, which were welcomed by the leaders of the Member States at the European Council meeting on 18 December 2025,⁴ and it allows my teams to identify rapidly and systematically address implementation barriers.

Demography

In the area of demography, my services conducted during the month of April 2026 a progress review of the initiatives under the Demography Toolbox. This exercise has provided a comprehensive overview of current actions, enabling us to identify gaps and opportunities to effectively mainstream demography across EU policy. This will allow to strengthen policy coordination and enhancing the efficiency of our initiatives.

Furthermore, on 14 July 2026, I launched the third [EU Demography Report](#). This report provides up-to-date evidence based on current demographic trends and projections, their implications across key policy areas and the initiatives already taken by the EU to address their consequences. It contributes to raising awareness of demographic change and seeks to support informed policy actions. The report takes stock of all EU initiatives intended to address the consequences of demographic change and reflects on how to better support Member States in managing such challenges.

³ Enforcement of EU rules is mainly relevant for Executive Vice-Presidents and Commissioners responsible for legislative acquis in their portfolios. As this is not the case for external relations with the Middle East, North Africa, and the Gulf, as well as in the field of demography, this section only focuses on the implementation of relevant policies.

⁴ European Council, 'European Council meeting (18 December 2025) – Conclusions', 18 December 2025, available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/wqmknoh4/en-20251218-european-council-conclusions.pdf>.

Implementation Dialogues – engaging with our stakeholders

During the reporting period, I took initiatives to address the issues reported in the context of my first [Implementation Dialogue](#), which focused on **people-to-people initiatives in the Mediterranean** (July 2025).

Firstly, participants noted weak regional coordination levels among national authorities and with the EU, combined with insufficient country-specific policies and limited continuity, and low levels of women's participation. **MED Skills Tracker**, a joint initiative of DG MENA, DG EMPL and DG HOME and the European Training Foundation (ETF) under the first iteration of the Action Plan of the Pact, aims to improve coordination among relevant national authorities by organising coordination meetings, providing technical assistance and encouraging the exchange of best practices. The initiative aims to address the critical issue of skills documentation and recognition by effectively supporting the transparency, comparability and portability of the skills, competences and knowledge of people in the region, thereby enhancing the overall competitiveness of labour markets. We have completed already all necessary preparations ahead of implementation, which is scheduled to begin in September 2026 with selected countries in the region.

Secondly, stakeholders pointed out that currently the Mediterranean area presents limited academic mobility and poor system integration across the higher education, including an underuse of the existing networks among universities. This is why in March 2026 the Commission adopted a measure⁵ to establish a coordinating Secretariat and university consortia for the **Mediterranean University** as part of the Pact for the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean University will build on and support existing networks and frameworks, develop joint educational activities and promote stronger academic links, mobility of students, academic staff and researchers.

Thirdly, the issue of lack of youth engagement in the partner countries south and east of the Mediterranean was also pinpointed as a major area of concern. To strengthen youth engagement in the Common Mediterranean Space, we are launching the **Youth Parliamentary Assembly for the Mediterranean**, with the first plenary session envisaged by the end of this year. The Assembly will bring together elected, young representatives from national parliaments of the southern Mediterranean partner countries, national parliaments of EU Member States and the European Parliament, to discuss and advise on the implementation of the Pact for the Mediterranean and other Mediterranean policy issues of joint interest.

In the area of demography, on 18 November 2025 I held my second [Implementation Dialogue](#) focusing on the **older people pillar of the Demography Toolbox**. The aim was to gather input from stakeholders regarding future policy options that could be used to improve the situation of older people in the EU, with the intention of simplifying procedures as much as possible. Participants underlined that older people are *“the only population group in the EU without a dedicated, comprehensive policy framework”*, as compared to, for example, children and young people. There is currently no EU-wide strategy, action plan or roadmap specifically addressing older people as a specific group. This was regarded as a structural gap in the protection of the rights of older people and weakens the EU's ability to fully harness the social and economic potential of longer lives. The implementation dialogue also identified the need for a comprehensive plan to mainstream age equality across all EU policies and improve implementation at Member State level, while avoiding policy fragmentation. In this context and as a follow up to these discussions, I am preparing a longevity roadmap intended to address these questions in a more coordinated and efficient manner.

The first Implementation Dialogue I held in 2026 focused on [renewable energy investments](#) and gathered 17 representatives of the renewable energy sector. The discussions were specifically conceived to guide the implementation of the [T-MED Initiative](#), a flagship initiative of the Pact for the Mediterranean launched on 9 June 2026 in the margins of the 2026 European Union Sustainable Energy Week.

⁵ Commission Implementing Decision (EU) C(2026) 2251 of 30 March 2026 on the financing of the multiannual action plan in favour of the Mediterranean University for 2025-2026, available at https://north-africa-middle-east-gulf.ec.europa.eu/commission-implementing-decision-3032026-financing-multiannual-action-plan-favour-mediterranean_en-files

Stakeholders recognised EU's efforts in helping EU's private sector tapping into MENA's renewable potential at this critical geopolitical point, while participants highlighted four major challenges:

- **High capital costs and risk**, needing stronger guarantees and long-term offtake deals;
- **Competition from subsidised Chinese manufacturing**, requiring EU concessional financing and a unified competitiveness strategy.
- **Infrastructure gaps**, demanding grid upgrades, interconnections and green hydrogen integration.
- **Regulatory fragmentation**, calling for harmonised standards and clearer cost-sharing rules.

These insights will be essential in shaping T-MED's rollout, and I will work with my teams to operationalise them, so our deployment stays grounded in the realities our stakeholders have identified

4. Way forward

In terms of **simplification**, my services are working together with DG INTPA and DG ENEST to identify ways to streamline the governance of financial instruments in view of the next Multiannual Financial Framework. This early engagement is key to laying the groundwork for a more streamlined architecture, ensuring our future instruments are less complex and more effective.

On the **implementation** side, I will continue to work closely with my teams to ensure we deliver on our policy objectives while prioritising the facilitation of cooperation with our partner countries and stakeholders. The next 12 months will be crucial for the deployment of concrete initiatives that will directly contribute to this end, such as the **T-MED Investment Platform**, initiative included in the Pact's Action Plan which will be operational in October 2026. The objective of this platform is to serve as a central coordination mechanism, designed to mobilise up to €25 billion in investments by 2035. Meeting every six months with the Commission acting as Secretariat, the platform will unite EU institutions, International Financial Institutions, private investors, and project promoters under one structure. By streamlining how we match a pipeline of projects with public and private finance, we will make the best possible use of available EU financial instruments under the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+).

In the same vein, we will continue to work with the **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)** signatories and relevant stakeholders to advance viable projects and collectively support the broader objective of diversified, resilient and efficient connectivity, to maximise the geoeconomic effectiveness of IMEC, whose strategic importance has become patent after the recent events in the region.

Beyond these two initiatives, my services will continue working in the implementation of the Pact for the Mediterranean through the deployment of other initiatives included in the first iteration of the Action Plan of the Pact and the upcoming ones.

Similarly, we continue deepening our strategic relations with the Gulf. Negotiations on the **Strategic Partnership Agreements (SPAs)** have been launched with the UAE, Qatar and, most recently, Bahrain. In the coming year we aim to advance negotiations including with the remaining agreements with Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman. Negotiations on the SPAs should also take into account parallel talks on the relevant free trade agreements. The advancement and eventual conclusion of these SPAs will result in a more structured, coherent partnership with the region; this will streamline the implementation of our mutual commitments, simplify communication and provide a more efficient channel for delivering on our foreign policy objectives. The second EU-GCC Summit, will serve as a critical opportunity to give additional momentum to these efforts and deliver concrete results.

I will also hold further Implementation Dialogues with key stakeholders to identify concrete ways to simplify and improve the delivery of policies under my remit. The next implementation dialogue will take place in Autumn 2026 and will focus on the Demography Toolbox, taking stock of its implementation course. It is expected to feed into future initiatives related to longevity.

Annex: examples

Firefighting Hub

The European Firefighting Hub in Cyprus, which was established in May 2026 as part of the Pact's Action Plan, is a recently established initiative coordinated between DG MENA, ECHO and REGIO. Centred on the Cyprus Regional Aerial Firefighting Station (CRAFS), it will facilitate cross-border deployment protocols in the event of wildfire emergencies. The CRAFS will align closely with the objectives of the Preparedness Union Strategy and the adopted Pact for the Mediterranean, in particular with the Mediterranean Disaster Preparedness and Resilience dimension. The CRAFS is to be co-shaped with Cyprus and will focus on three pillars: (i) infrastructure for forest fire operations; (ii) capacity support; and (iii) prevention and preparedness through a Centre of Excellence focusing on training, innovation, and knowledge exchange, as well as for hosting joint exercises. The CRAS will also serve for seasonal pre-positioning of aerial firefighting assets, such as planes and helicopters, during nearby emergencies. Going forward, CRAFS will play a key role in aligning deployment practices and protocols, thereby contributing to enhanced disaster preparedness and resilience in the Mediterranean. For instance, two CRAFS Air Tractors were deployed in France this July to help fight the wildfires in the south of the country.⁶

STARTUP4MED

The Startup4Med initiative, also included in the Action Plan of the Pact, will improve access to finance and strengthen the entrepreneurship ecosystem across our southern Mediterranean partners. Through the deployment of EFSD+ blending and guarantees with the mobilisation of approximately EUR 470 million in guarantee capacity, as well as accompanying technical assistance, we are consolidating the financial landscape for youth-led and women-led businesses, effectively bridging the gap between early-stage innovation and mature market participation. By integrating regional Team Europe Initiatives and coordinating policy dialogues via the Union for the Mediterranean, this action intends to eliminate procedural fragmentation and align bilateral support with a unified strategy for inclusive job creation. The implementation of this initiative was kicked-started <https://north-africa-middle-east-gulf.ec.europa.eu/news/joint-press-release-launch-equity-window-social-entrepreneurship-fund-sef-boost-sustainable-jobs-and-2026-06-02> in June through the launching the [Social Entrepreneurship Fund](#). This is the first EU-backed fund in the region and it will support social entrepreneurs in scaling up their businesses by providing access to financing beyond traditional channels.

Atlas of Demography

The JRC is developing the [Atlas of Demography](#) – an interactive tool which brings together demographic data from official statistics and projections as well as new data produced by the JRC – in order to transform it into an interactive and dynamic platform for the exchange and dissemination of knowledge on demography. The new Atlas will contribute to bringing together policy makers, experts, and stakeholders to enable creating fruitful exchanges and synergies, which could lead towards more efficient evidence-based policies.

⁶ Cyprus means deployed in France against wild fires, <https://cy.ambafrance.org/Cyprus-means-deployed-in-France-against-wild-fires>.