

2025
ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

*Simplification,
Implementation
& Enforcement*

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1. Introduction

This report covers progress on key policy objectives, implementation, simplification, and enforcement efforts made in EU relations with the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf as well as in the field of demography during the period 1 January to 31 July 2025.

As the first-ever Commissioner for the Mediterranean, I want to ensure that the EU strengthens its partnerships with the countries in the region for our common sustainable prosperity, security and resilience. As set out in the President's [political guidelines](#) and my [mission letter](#), we aim to accomplish this by investing smarter and more efficiently in open political and economic exchanges, jobs and skills creation, joint energy security and climate action, security and migration management, and other areas of mutual interest such as culture, research and education. Tailored offers to each partner are aimed to produce greater EU leverage, more local ownership, greater synergies and reform momentum.

My work is supported by the new Directorate-General for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf ([DG MENA](#)), created on 1 February 2025 as the Commission's gateway for and to the region.

In the field of demography, the efforts to tackle the demographic challenges continue at all levels, both internally, across the European Union and, of course, in international relations, among others through the implementation of the Demography Toolbox as well as increasing participation in the labour market.

2. Executive Summary

A key initiative embodying the Commission's commitment has been the coming up with the [Pact for the Mediterranean](#) (the Pact) to redefine the EU's approach to cooperation with the Southern Neighbourhood. We did this through extensive consultations with EU Member States, partner countries, international organisations, young people and civil society organisations in a genuinely inclusive and collaborative process.

Drawing on the [2021 Agenda for the Mediterranean](#) and on the Economic and Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbourhood, the Pact will complement cooperation at bilateral level as a pragmatic and flexible framework to strengthen dialogue and cooperation with partners in the Euro-Mediterranean area along key areas of engagement, such as people-to-people initiatives; stronger and more integrated economies; security, resilience and migration management. The Pact is due to be adopted in the autumn of 2025.

Beyond the Pact which is a regional initiative we are working on Strategic and Comprehensive Partnerships (SCP) with the countries in the region. We are implementing them with [Tunisia](#) (since July 2023) and [Egypt](#) (since March 2024), and on behalf of the Commission I signed a new SCP with [Jordan](#) in January 2025, recognising its strategic role in the region's stability and the economic and social challenges the country should address.

The Commission is also enhancing its collaboration with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and its Member States on key issues of common interest, such as energy, digital innovation, connectivity, people-to-people contacts, investments, trade, and security, with a view to strengthening economic connections and address shared challenges. On its recommendation, the Council in July authorised the opening of negotiations with each individual GCC Member State on Strategic Partnership Agreements (SPAs). Negotiations on this new generation of agreements should start in the autumn of 2025. This demonstrates the EU's geopolitical commitment to upgrade its bilateral relationships with each GCC Member State and the GCC as such, and as a direct follow-up to the [EU's Strategy for the Gulf](#) (2022) and the October [2024 EU-GCC Summit](#).

The Strategic Partnership Agreements (SPAs) are pivotal for advancing EU-GCC relations. By fostering collaboration on trade, security, energy, and digital innovation, these agreements aim to strengthen economic connections and address shared challenges. The SPAs provide a structured framework for tackling common issues and seizing new opportunities, taking EU-Gulf relations to a higher level.

DG MENA will continue strengthening existing partnerships, work on new partnerships and engage on initiatives in the region, including the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), and the Trans-Mediterranean Renewable Energy and Clean Tech Cooperation Initiative (T-MED). This will contribute to enhancing the strategic framing of the EU's financial and technical assistance with partner countries.

In the field of demography, exchanges with partner countries and Member States regularly focused on the implementation of the Demography Toolbox. A [Youth Policy Dialogue](#) was also dedicated to this topic which hosted a number of young people from across the European Union and the MENA region.

3. Delivering Results: Key Measures

A. Simplification and stress tests

DG MENA plays a key role in extending the benefits and EU policy solutions to partner countries in the MENA region, for instance in Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, and Jordan, by promoting reforms, regulatory convergence and regional cooperation in priority sectors such as green energy, circular economy, digital, and competitiveness. This work is inspired by [simplification measures](#) designed for the EU internal market where possible. DG MENA has also cooperated with DG INTPA in the drafting of the [proposal on the Simplification of the External Action Guarantee](#).

B. Implementation and Enforcement¹

The Pact aims at deepening the EU's strategic engagement across all shores of the Mediterranean Sea. A region-wide survey in the spring of 2025 gathered the views of around 700 experts of the region, across civil society, academia and citizens, while numerous thematic and regional events provided the occasion to discuss various topics with more than 1000 stakeholders. The outcome of the consultations has been discussed at institutional level in the framework of the EU-Southern Neighbourhood Ministerial, preceded by a Senior Officials Meeting. On these occasions, partner countries and EU Member States confirmed their interest to work together pragmatically on concrete initiatives, delivering tangible benefits for people and societies under key areas of cooperation. The Pact is currently being drafted and is expected to be adopted in autumn of 2025.

During the [Implementation Dialogue](#) held with 20 different partner entities in July 2025, stakeholders conveyed their appreciation for the ongoing collaboration with the EU on people-to-people initiatives in the Mediterranean region, on a number of topics, ranging from culture and education to skills development and mobility. They reported about positive outcomes from EU initiatives under the 2021 New Agenda, emphasising the potential for strengthening regional cooperation and integrating Southern partners better into policy dialogues, highlighting the need for cross-sectoral alignment of initiatives in education, culture, employment to enhance impact on communities, as well as the importance of involving local actors, civil society, and youth in designing initiatives. Among challenges hindering implementation, shrinking civic space in some countries, restricted access to EU funding for civil society, limited awareness of financial opportunities, as well as visa complexities impeding mobility and persisting gender disparities were underlined. Stakeholders showed a keen interest in participating in future initiatives under the forthcoming Pact.

The [Strategic Comprehensive Partnership \(SCP\)](#) I recently signed with Jordan aims at upscaling the cooperation to better tackle common challenges. The joint declaration identifies areas for renewed engagement to fostering

¹ 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."

security, stability and economic opportunities for Jordan and the EU. The SCP is accompanied with EUR 1 billion support to Jordan in support of hosting refugees and strengthening their internal market. Work is ongoing on a joint roadmap for its implementation. The SCPs we are implementing with Egypt and Jordan are examples of ambitious yet realistic frameworks for cooperation that we aim at establishing also with other countries in the region. They set the foundation for deeper cooperation, assurance for stakeholders and closer alignment of the Union's financial and technical assistance with the specific priorities enshrined in the Partnerships. Tunisia remains a key strategic partner for the EU: the 2023 SCP provides a robust and comprehensive framework on trade, digitalisation, renewable energy and migration and mobility.

Using a different but equally ambitious approach, the EU's multiannual and comprehensive programme for [Palestine recovery and resilience](#), announced in April 2025, sets aside up to EUR 1.6 billion for the period 2025-2027. The programme includes three pillars: 1) direct financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority supporting the implementation of its Reform Agenda amid difficult circumstances; 2) projects for good governance, and socio-economic stabilisation and recovery in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza (when conditions allow), as well as support to Palestine refugees and UNRWA; and 3) support to the Palestine private sector with loans from the European Investment Bank thanks to an EU-funded guarantee.

Syria's recovery: The EU actively supports the Syrian people in rebuilding an inclusive and peaceful country. Our support up to now has included the lifting of economic sanctions, a [socio-economic recovery package](#) of EUR 175 million and the reintegration of Syria in flagship EU programmes (e.g. Erasmus+). We are leading the efforts to coordinate donors and stakeholders in designing a joint strategy for rapid and sustainable economic recovery, which is crucial to create the conditions for the return of Syrians, whether they live abroad or are internally displaced.

The **Global Gateway Strategy** will foster sustainable development and resilience in partner countries through investments in areas such as infrastructure, digital connectivity, and renewable energy in the MENA region. To improve the efficiency and impact of the EU's financial instruments, the Commission has introduced or is discussing several simplification measures to reduce administrative burden, accelerate project delivery, enhance the effectiveness of EU external financing tools, including streamlined reporting requirements to ease compliance and monitoring, reduced negotiation processes through the broader use of top-ups and umbrella agreements, simplifying the contracting process, and simplified blending processes, particularly in collaboration with the European Investment Bank (EIB). The Commission has been instrumental in giving new impetus to the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and Trans-Mediterranean Renewable Energy and Clean Tech Cooperation Initiative (T-MED).

Strategic Partnership Agreements (SPAs): Following a proposal from the Commission's and the High Representative, the Council adopted the [negotiating directives for the SPAs](#) the EU wishes to conclude with all six Gulf countries, i.e. Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain. After the formal offer to the countries to engage in such negotiations, DG MENA will be the entry point and coordinate the Commission's services work on the SPAs. As the Commission seeks to enhance its cooperation with the Gulf countries on issues of common interest, ranging from energy to people-to-people contacts, these Agreements will provide for an institutional framework for our current and future cooperation and bring relations with the Gulf to a new level. They will bolster cooperation on foreign policy, strategic and security dialogues, including on crisis management and conflict prevention, justice, freedom and human rights, trade-related matters, renewable energy and green transition, artificial intelligence as well as development cooperation, economic development and cultural partnerships.

EU-GCC relations: Since January 2025, the EU and the GCC have taken steps to reinvigorate negotiations for a bloc-to-bloc (regional) FTA with exploratory meetings between EU-GCC negotiators on relaunching negotiations. The EU has also updated the negotiating directives for the regional and bilateral FTAs, and started negotiations of a bilateral FTA with the UAE in May 2025 reflecting a tailored approach that complements and builds blocks for broader regional efforts.

Financial support: Given the volatile geopolitical context, a high degree of flexibility and responsiveness of DG MENA is required, while ensuring predictability of our financial support. Consequently, wherever possible, the programming of financial cooperation with MENA countries has been simplified through the adoption of [multiannual measures](#). Furthermore, to enhance the efficiency of our cooperation delivery, different actions have been

consolidated within a single financing decision, when the adoption procedure permits. In the interest of further simplification and streamlining, the financial procedures and workflows related to the adoption of Financing Decisions have been revised to grant greater responsibilities to the Delegations. This not only simplifies the process but also underscores the pivotal role played by our Delegations on the ground.

Migration management has been more systematically integrated into bilateral cooperation with partners, better converging with other priority sectors such as governance, economic opportunities and social inclusion. The newly revised multi-annual Regional Migration Programme South ensures a continuous financial support. In this context, DG MENA is finalising the new Multiannual Action Plan 2025–2027, with an allocation of EUR 675 million, in line with the external dimension of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum. The comprehensive support to enhanced border management and fighting migrant smuggling capacities, the protection of vulnerable migrants, voluntary returns and reintegration and the establishment of legal migration pathways have contributed to the [reduction of irregular border crossings](#) towards the EU and have helped partner countries notably in North Africa to better manage with the migration.

Demography: Tackling demographic challenges was regularly discussed in the dialogues with Member States as well as partner countries. A [Youth Policy Dialogue](#) was also dedicated to this topic. It identified key issues affecting young people, including a lack of housing in urban areas and of economic opportunities in rural areas, and difficulties in transitioning from education to employment. The youth policy dialogue has put forward concrete ideas from the participants to enhance mobility for people living outside urban areas, to foster economic opportunities through rural business, and to smooth the transition from education to employment.

4. Way forward

In the coming year, my services will continue to work on all key policy files:

- The **Pact for the Mediterranean:** As of its adoption, the implementation of the Pact will be a top priority. DG MENA will work hand in hand with other Commission services to ensure that practical initiatives from the Pact will be put into action as soon as possible in a coordinated and streamlined way. This will be done through an **Action Plan** agreed and implemented with the Member States and the partner countries. Where applicable, the initiatives will focus on facilitating legal and regulatory simplification.
- **Strategic and Comprehensive Partnerships:** The Commission will continue strengthening existing partnerships and work on other potential partnerships in the region that would also frame more strategically the financial and technical assistance with partner countries. For example, SCPs could be negotiated with Morocco and possibly Lebanon in the future. The comprehensive approach will be inspired by simplification measures where relevant and will aim for a successful implementation across all areas of engagement as well as for complementarities between bilateral and regional engagement.
- **Support resilience and stability:** The effects of the current crises will continue to be felt acutely in 2026, requiring EU investment in conflict resolution and resilience. The upcoming EU Middle East Strategy will provide an opportunity to further spell out the EU's vision on this difficult but key part of the region. Continued support to the Palestinian people and preserving the possibility of a two-state solution as well as substantial EU contribution to a “day after” scenario for Gaza will be key elements of DG MENA's future work. In Syria, the EU will continue to provide key support to the transition. While the situation remains fragile, the EU reiterates the historic opportunity to reunite and rebuild the country, rule of law and ensure accountability, and underlines the importance of an inclusive and Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process.
- **Trans-Mediterranean Renewable Energy and Clean Tech Cooperation Initiative (T-MED):** T-MED contributes to the Global Gateway strategy by turning the Mediterranean into a hub for renewable energy and clean tech industrial partnerships. As part of its implementation, the initiative foresees the establishment of a T-MED Investment Platform, bringing together development banks, private investors, and project promoters

around the shared agenda of scaling up investments in the renewable energy and clean tech sectors in the MENA region. The platform is currently under development, with its official launch foreseen in 2026.

- **Deeper EU relations with the Gulf**, via new Strategic Partnership Agreements (SPAs) with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries: in line with the expressed interest by the countries, negotiations will start in the autumn of 2025 and will include parallel talks on free trade agreements. We will thus open new commercial and investment opportunities, deepen partnerships in key areas of mutual interest such as energy/climate action, AI, digital and transport connectivity (IMEC corridor). Given the Gulf countries' growing geo-political and economic influence in the MENA region and beyond, the EU intends to pursue actively EU-GCC cooperation in the MENA region.
- **Demography**: A concrete follow-up on the ideas put forward during the Youth Policy Dialogue by including them in policy discussions and proposals. One proposal put forward in the Youth Policy Dialogue was to develop business and co-working hubs in rural areas to increase economic opportunities for young people and contrast depopulation in those areas. A further analysis and follow-up discussion could be organised, involving the relevant stakeholders, during this Commission mandate.

Annex: examples

- The **Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)**, with the contribution of the European Union, is undertaking strategic reforms to ensure its ability to support the implementation of the Pact in the future, among other priorities including a new strategic vision for the coming years. This will allow the organisation to have a greater impact on the public environment and on its citizens.
- Also the **Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF)**, with the financial support of the European Union, has a tangible added value in promoting intercultural dialogue through governments and its 43 national civil society networks, enhancing cross-networks and grassroots activities of small scale to generate a particular local impact, which could not have been achieved with other types of action.
- On initiatives related to higher education, skills enhancement and mobility, the **European Training Foundation (ETF)** is a great example of effective cooperation with the authorities in Morocco and Tunisia to further develop curricula for learning and development of skills needed in our partner countries. In Egypt, the ETF has ensured continued support to the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector, in particular by providing assessment of the Technical Education 2.0 strategy and supporting the establishment of the Sector Skills Council for renewable energy sector, in close coordination with the relevant authorities and stakeholders.
- DG MENA also supports the Regional Team Europe Initiative (TEI) on “**Jobs through Trade and Investment in the Southern Neighbourhood**” in cooperation with the [GIZ](#). Under this TEI, the Commission and five EU Member States join forces, together with financial institutions, to scale-up impact, focusing notably on inclusive and innovative entrepreneurship, skills for the future, and youth and women empowerment. The TEI promotes a regional approach that directly links to the UfM policy dialogues on employment, and trade and investment. It also connects to financial instruments, for example with the new **Social Entrepreneurship Fund** co-funded by the EU and Germany.
- The ongoing **Medusa** project will install 7 100 kilometres submarine optical fibre cable in the Mediterranean and connect Northern African countries with Cyprus, France, Italy, Portugal, and Spain with the aim of increasing by 200 times the speed of internet in Northern African universities. This project will address important connectivity needs and improve the digital and economic development of countries.