

Guideline for business in EuromedRegion



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Executive Summary

Business opportunities, cooperation frameworks and strategic pathways in the Euromed region

The Euro-Mediterranean (Euromed) region represents one of the European Union's most strategically important economic and geopolitical spaces within its immediate neighbourhood. By bringing together the European Union and the Southern Mediterranean countries, the region connects advanced industrial and innovation ecosystems with rapidly expanding markets, rising energy demand and strong development dynamics. With a combined population exceeding 720 million¹ inhabitants and a pivotal position along global trade and energy corridors, the Euromed region is increasingly recognised as a priority area for sustainable growth, industrial transformation and regional resilience.

This guide has been developed to support businesses, clusters and intermediary organisations in navigating the structural complexity of the Euromed region. It responds to a growing demand for structured and actionable guidance that goes beyond conventional market analysis, addressing instead the concrete cultural, regulatory, financial and strategic conditions shaping cross-border cooperation between European Union and Southern Mediterranean actors. The guide is integrating business strategy, policy alignment and operational realities into a single, coherent framework specifically tailored to the Euromed context. Rather than approaching market entry, financing, innovation and risk as separate challenges, it treats them as interdependent dimensions of sustainable cross-border cooperation.

Designed for both first-time entrants and experienced stakeholders, the guide serves as a preparatory reference for organisations initiating engagement in the Euromed region, as well as a strategic recalibration tool for those seeking to scale, diversify or consolidate existing partnerships and operations.

¹ Eurostat (2024); UN DESA (2024)





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The Euromed region as a strategic economic and innovation space

The Euromed region is characterised by asymmetric yet complementary development patterns. The European Union contributes strong industrial capacity, advanced technological ecosystems, robust regulatory frameworks and access to finance. Southern Mediterranean countries, in turn, offer demographic dynamism, expanding industrial bases, large-scale deployment potential and strategic relevance in the context of energy transition and supply chain resilience.

Recent global developments – including geopolitical tensions, supply chain disruptions and energy security concerns – have accelerated a shift toward regionalisation and nearshoring. As a result, the Euromed region is increasingly viewed not as a peripheral trade zone, but as an integrated economic and innovation ecosystem where co-production, collaborative innovation and regional value chains can flourish.

Strategic priorities shaping business opportunities

Business opportunities in the Euromed region are strongly influenced by EU and regional policy priorities. Sustainability, climate neutrality, digitalisation, industrial resilience and inclusive growth are no longer peripheral objectives, but central determinants of funding, partnership models and market access. More than two-thirds of EU innovation and competitiveness funding for the 2021–2027 period is explicitly linked to these priorities², a trend mirrored in neighbourhood and development cooperation instruments targeting Southern Mediterranean countries.

For businesses, strategic alignment with these priorities is not optional. Projects and initiatives that integrate green and digital dimensions, demonstrate measurable impact and adopt collaborative approaches are significantly more likely to access funding, attract institutional partners and achieve scale.

Clusters, partnerships and ecosystem-based engagement

One of the core messages of this guide is the central role of clusters and intermediary organisations in enabling effective Euromed cooperation. Clusters function as structured

² European Commission, *Multiannual Financial Framework 2021–2027 and NextGenerationEU – Europe’s Recovery Plan*, which allocate the majority of EU innovation, competitiveness and cohesion funding to objectives related to the green transition, climate neutrality, digital transformation, resilience and inclusive growth, including through programmes such as Horizon Europe, Digital Europe, Cohesion Policy Funds and neighbourhood cooperation instruments.





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ecosystems that reduce information asymmetries, build trust, facilitate regulatory navigation and support SME participation. Evidence from EU programmes consistently shows that cluster-based and inter-cluster cooperation models outperform standalone approaches in terms of market entry success, innovation uptake and partnership sustainability.

For SMEs in particular, engagement through clusters offers a lower-risk pathway to internationalisation, providing access to shared services, matchmaking opportunities and institutional credibility that would be difficult to achieve independently.

Market entry, financing and innovation pathways

Successful market entry in the Euromed region rarely follows linear or standardised models. Instead, it typically unfolds through phased engagement, combining exploratory actions, strategic partnerships, pilot projects and, in some cases, joint ventures or co-production models. Pilot projects play a critical role as gateways to market access, allowing solutions to be tested, adapted and validated under local conditions while building trust among stakeholders.

Financing mechanisms in the Euromed region reflect the intersection of policy objectives and business logic. EU funding, development finance, national schemes and blended finance instruments provide substantial opportunities, but they also require strategic coherence, administrative capacity and long-term vision. Businesses that treat funding as a catalyst for market integration – rather than as an end in itself – are more likely to achieve financial sustainability.

Business culture, regulation and risk management

Cultural and regulatory diversity is a defining feature of the Euromed region. Differences in communication styles, decision-making processes, compliance cultures and regulatory frameworks significantly influence business outcomes. Effective cooperation requires cultural intelligence, regulatory literacy and the ability to balance formal compliance with relational trust.

Risk in the Euromed region should be understood as a structural feature rather than an exception. Regulatory uncertainty, macroeconomic volatility and operational complexity necessitate proactive risk management and resilient partnership structures. Clusters and intermediaries play a key role in mitigating these risks by providing coordination, local expertise and governance support.

Impact, sustainability and long-term value creation





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The guide emphasises a shift from short-term outputs toward long-term impact and value creation. Economic, environmental and social impact measurement is increasingly central to funding decisions, investment logic and strategic positioning. Initiatives that integrate impact considerations into their design, business models and scaling strategies are better positioned to secure follow-up financing and achieve durable market presence.

Long-term value in the Euromed region is most effectively created through sustained ecosystem engagement, where learning, replication and scaling occur across project cycles and organisational boundaries.

Purpose and use of this guide

This guide is intended as a practical and strategic reference for:

- businesses seeking to enter or expand within the Euromed region,
- clusters and intermediary organisations supporting internationalisation and innovation,
- policymakers and programme managers designing cooperation frameworks.

By combining strategic analysis, applied guidance, case-based insights and practical decision-support tools, the guide aims to reduce uncertainty, support informed decision-making and contribute to more effective, sustainable and inclusive Euromed cooperation.



Chapter 1

The Euromed region: economic, geopolitical and industrial context for business

1.1. The Euromed region as an economic and innovation space

The Euro-Mediterranean (Euromed) region represents a strategic economic interface between the European Union and the Southern Mediterranean countries, forming one of the most significant zones of interaction between developed and emerging economies in the wider neighbourhood of Europe. With a combined population exceeding 720 million inhabitants, the region plays a pivotal role in global trade dynamics, accounting for approximately 30% of global trade flows when EU external trade and Mediterranean transport corridors are considered together.³

Economically, the Euromed region is characterised by asymmetric yet highly complementary development patterns. The European Union, generating around EUR 16 trillion in gross domestic product, contributes strong industrial capacity, advanced technological ecosystems, mature financial markets and a dense regulatory framework that shapes innovation and competitiveness (Eurostat, 2023). In contrast, Southern Mediterranean economies, while structurally diverse, display higher demographic growth rates, rapidly expanding energy demand and increasing levels of investment in industrial modernisation and infrastructure development (World Bank, MENA Economic Update).

This asymmetry generates a functional interdependence that underpins Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. European companies increasingly seek cost-efficient deployment environments, access to growing markets and more resilient regional value chains, while Southern Mediterranean countries require advanced technologies, managerial know-how and integration into international markets. In recent years, geopolitical tensions, repeated global supply chain disruptions and heightened energy security concerns have accelerated a trend towards regionalisation. As a result, the Euromed region has gained strategic relevance as a space for nearshoring, co-production and collaborative innovation, particularly in sectors linked to sustainability and industrial transformation (OECD, Global Value Chains Report).

³ European Commission, *Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – A new Agenda for the Mediterranean*, JOIN(2021) 2 final, Brussels, 9.2.2021; Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), *Key Figures on the Mediterranean Region*; UNCTAD, *Review of Maritime Transport*, latest edition.



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1.2. Industrial transformation and sustainability pressures

Industrial transformation constitutes a shared structural challenge across the Euromed region, albeit driven by different underlying dynamics. According to the International Energy Agency, industrial activities account for approximately 25% of total energy consumption within the European Union, while regional energy data indicate that industrial energy use remains a significant component of final energy consumption in several Southern Mediterranean countries, reflecting the continued prominence of energy-intensive industries.⁴ At the same time, the European Union has committed to an ambitious climate agenda, aiming to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels, as part of the European Green Deal.⁵

Southern Mediterranean countries face a different, yet converging, set of pressures. Energy demand in the region is projected to increase by around 30% by 2040, driven by population growth, urbanisation and industrial expansion.⁶ This dual context generates a strong and structurally sustained demand for renewable energy solutions, industrial decarbonisation technologies, energy efficiency measures and advanced digital optimisation tools, including artificial intelligence-enabled monitoring and predictive systems.

Consequently, the Euromed region can be understood as a dual-speed transformation zone, in which regulatory-driven transformation in the European Union converges with investment-driven transformation in Southern Mediterranean economies. This convergence creates fertile ground for joint industrial projects that combine compliance-driven innovation with large-scale deployment potential.

1.3. Digitalisation and artificial intelligence as cross-cutting enablers

Digitalisation is increasingly recognised as a horizontal enabler of both sustainability and competitiveness across the Euromed region, rather than as an isolated technological domain. According to the European Commission, firms adopting advanced digital technologies achieve productivity gains in the range of approximately 20–25% compared to non-digitalised enterprises.⁷ Furthermore, the application of artificial intelligence in industrial processes has

⁴ Eurostat, *Final energy consumption in industry – detailed statistics*, July 2025

⁵ European Commission, *European Green Deal and European Climate Law (Regulation (EU) 2021/1119)*

⁶ International Energy Agency (IEA), *Africa Energy Outlook* (latest edition)

⁷ European Commission (2020), *Shaping Europe's Digital Future*



been shown to reduce energy consumption by up to 10–20% through process optimisation and predictive maintenance.⁸

In Southern Mediterranean countries, levels of digital adoption remain uneven, reflecting structural disparities in infrastructure, skills and investment capacity. Nevertheless, investment trends indicate rapid acceleration. Digital infrastructure investments across MENA countries have grown at double-digit annual rates since 2018, with industrial applications of artificial intelligence increasingly prioritised in sectors such as energy, manufacturing and logistics.⁹ This evolution creates a clear convergence opportunity, whereby European digital and AI solution providers can partner with Southern Mediterranean industrial actors to deploy applied, market-oriented solutions that address concrete operational and sustainability challenges.

1.4. From fragmented markets to regional value chains

Historically, Euro-Mediterranean economic relations have been dominated by trade in goods, often characterised by limited integration beyond transactional exchanges. However, both policy evolution and market realities increasingly favour the development of regional value chains. The European Commission notes that a majority of EU imports from neighbouring regions consist of intermediate goods rather than finished products, underscoring the growing importance of cross-border production linkages.¹⁰

In this context, regional value chains offer several strategic advantages, including reduced exposure to global supply shocks, improved alignment with sustainability and regulatory standards, and enhanced diffusion of innovation across borders. Clusters and inter-cluster cooperation mechanisms significantly increase the likelihood of successful value chain integration. Evidence from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform indicates that firms involved in cluster-based internationalisation initiatives are two to three times more likely to enter new markets and are substantially more inclined to engage in joint innovation projects.

1.5. Policy frameworks shaping business opportunities

The Euromed business environment is strongly shaped by European and regional policy frameworks that actively influence funding priorities, partnership models and acceptable forms

⁸ European Commission, Joint Research Centre (JRC), *Artificial Intelligence for Energy: Opportunities and Challenges*, and International Energy Agency (IEA), *Digitalisation and Energy*

⁹ World Bank, *Digital Transformation in the Middle East and North Africa*; OECD, *AI Adoption and Diffusion in Industry*; International Energy Agency (IEA), *Digitalisation and Energy*

¹⁰ European Commission, *EU Industrial Strategy* and Eurostat international trade statistics

of market engagement. These frameworks display a consistent preference for collaborative, multi-actor projects, prioritise climate innovation, renewable energy, sustainable industry and digitalisation, and place strong emphasis on measurable economic, environmental and social impact.

EU-funded initiatives such as Euromed Clusters Forward explicitly promote inter-cluster cooperation, SME participation in cross-border projects and the creation of sustainable regional value chains. Evidence from EU programmes indicates that collaborative projects involving SMEs, clusters and research organisations are associated with stronger innovation performance and longer-term sustainability than isolated initiatives.¹¹

1.6. Implications for businesses and clusters

Taken together, the quantitative indicators and structural dynamics outlined above translate into clear strategic implications for businesses and clusters. The Euromed region represents a high-growth corridor for sustainable and digital solutions, where market access is increasingly conditioned by policy alignment and partnership capacity. Pilot projects and collaborative initiatives serve to reduce market entry risks and enhance scalability, while cluster-based engagement significantly increases visibility, credibility and access to funding. Consequently, the Euromed region should be approached not as a collection of discrete national markets, but as an integrated innovation and business ecosystem.

Chapter 2

EU–South Mediterranean strategic priorities and their implications for businesses

2.1. Why strategic priorities matter for business decisions

In the Euromed region, business opportunities are increasingly shaped not only by market forces, but by strategic public policy priorities. Unlike purely liberalised market environments, EU–South Mediterranean cooperation operates within a framework where regulation, funding instruments and industrial policy are deeply interconnected. Empirical evidence from EU-funded

¹¹ European Commission, *SME Performance Review and EU Industrial Strategy*



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programmes indicates that companies whose activities align with EU strategic priorities are more likely to access public funding, attract institutional partners and investors, and scale cross-border collaborations¹²

According to the European Commission, a substantial majority of EU innovation and competitiveness funding allocated during the 2021–2027 programming period is explicitly linked to sustainability, digitalisation and resilience objectives.¹³ Similar priorities are reflected in neighbourhood and external action instruments targeting Southern Mediterranean countries. For businesses, this reality implies that strategic alignment is no longer optional, but a core determinant of competitiveness.

2.2. Climate neutrality and the green transition as structural priorities

The green transition constitutes the central pillar of EU industrial and economic strategy. Under the European Green Deal, the European Union has committed to climate neutrality by 2050, with interim targets requiring a 55% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 1990 levels.¹⁴ Industrial activities play a decisive role in achieving these objectives, accounting for roughly 20% of EU greenhouse gas emissions, with energy-intensive sectors such as cement, steel, chemicals and manufacturing facing steadily increasing carbon costs.¹⁵

In parallel, Southern Mediterranean countries are accelerating renewable energy deployment at an unprecedented pace. Renewable energy capacity in the MENA region has increased more than fivefold since 2010, with solar energy emerging as the fastest-growing segment due to favourable irradiation conditions and declining technology costs (IRENA).¹⁶ This dynamic creates a complementary opportunity structure in which European companies contribute low-carbon technologies, engineering expertise and system integration capabilities, while Southern Mediterranean markets provide scale, deployment potential and strategic relevance for regional energy security. As a result, projects related to renewable energy, energy efficiency and industrial decarbonisation are among the most fundable and scalable business opportunities in the Euromed region.

¹² European Commission, *Better Regulation: Evaluation of EU Funding Programmes; SME Performance Review; and EU Industrial Strategy*

¹³ European Commission, *Multiannual Financial Framework 2021–2027 and NextGenerationEU*

¹⁴ European Commission, *The European Green Deal; Regulation (EU) 2021/1119 (European Climate Law)*

¹⁵ European Environment Agency (EEA), *Greenhouse gas emissions by sector*; European Commission, *EU Emissions Trading System (ETS)*

¹⁶ International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), *Renewable Capacity Statistics and Renewable Energy Market Analysis: Africa and Middle East*





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2.3. Digitalisation and artificial intelligence as competitiveness enablers

Digitalisation is increasingly recognised not as a standalone sector, but as a cross-cutting enabler of sustainability and industrial competitiveness. According to European Commission analyses, the widespread deployment of digital technologies has the potential to contribute significantly to emissions reductions by 2030 through efficiency gains across multiple sectors. In industrial contexts, artificial intelligence-enabled optimization can deliver productivity improvements in the order of 10–15% and substantially reduce unplanned downtime, depending on sector, process maturity and implementation conditions.¹⁷

Despite persistent disparities in adoption levels, Southern Mediterranean countries are steadily increasing investments in digital infrastructure. Across the MENA region, the ICT sector has recorded high single-digit annual growth on average over the past decade, supported by expanding broadband connectivity, data infrastructure and digital services.¹⁸ Within this context, digital solutions applied to energy systems, logistics and manufacturing are among the fastest-growing areas of deployment. For businesses, this implies that AI, data analytics and digital platforms function as value multipliers rather than standalone products. Integrated solutions that combine sustainability objectives with digital capabilities are consistently prioritised by funders and industrial partners in EU–South Mediterranean cooperation programmes.¹⁹

2.4. Industrial resilience and regional value chain integration

Recent global disruptions have exposed the vulnerabilities of extended global value chains, prompting the European Union to elevate industrial resilience and strategic autonomy to the forefront of its policy agenda. Key responses include supplier diversification, nearshoring and friend-shoring strategies, as well as reinforcement of regional production ecosystems. OECD data indicates that regional value chains account for a growing share of manufacturing trade and that firms embedded in regional networks recover more rapidly from external shocks.²⁰

¹⁷ European Commission, *Shaping Europe's Digital Future* and Joint Research Centre (JRC)

¹⁸ World Bank, *Digital Transformation in the Middle East and North Africa*; International Telecommunication Union (ITU), *Measuring Digital Development – Facts and Figures*; OECD, *Digital Economy Outlook*,

¹⁹ European Commission, *A New Agenda for the Mediterranean*; *European Green Deal*; and *Shaping Europe's Digital Future*

²⁰ OECD, *Global Value Chains: Efficiency and Risks in the Context of COVID-19*; OECD, *Interconnected Economies: Global Value Chains*





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Within the Euromed context, this policy orientation translates into stronger emphasis on EU–South Mediterranean industrial cooperation, incentives for co-production and joint ventures, and a preference for projects that strengthen regional complementarities. Clusters and inter-cluster cooperation mechanisms are explicitly promoted as tools for reducing coordination costs, accelerating trust-building and facilitating SME participation in cross-border value chains.

2.5. SME-centric approach and inclusive growth

Small and medium-sized enterprises are central to Euromed economic strategies, representing over 99% of enterprises in both EU and Southern Mediterranean economies and accounting for between 60% and 70% of employment in many South Med countries²¹. Nevertheless, SMEs face persistent structural constraints, including limited access to finance, reduced internationalisation capacity and lower absorption of innovation.

EU-funded cooperation frameworks explicitly address these constraints by promoting cluster-based internationalisation, supporting pilot projects and matchmaking activities, and lowering entry barriers for SMEs in cross-border initiatives. For businesses, participation in such collaborative frameworks significantly reduces risk, particularly for SMEs entering new markets or testing innovative solutions.

2.6. Implications for business strategy in the Euromed region

The strategic priorities outlined above translate into concrete implications for companies and clusters operating in the Euromed region. Projects aligned with green and digital priorities are more likely to be funded and supported, while cross-border collaborative initiatives consistently outperform isolated market entry attempts. Integrated solutions that combine technology, business models and measurable impact are preferred over standalone products. From a strategic perspective, the Euromed region rewards businesses that adopt an ecosystem-based approach, align commercial objectives with policy-driven priorities and use pilot collaborations as stepping stones toward scale.

Chapter 3

²¹ European Commission, *Annual Report on European SMEs*; OECD, *SME and Entrepreneurship Outlook*; World Bank, *SMEs Finance and Employment in MENA*,



Sustainable Transitions Connect – conceptual presentation

Sustainable Transitions Connect is a Euro-Mediterranean cooperation framework developed within the *Euromed Clusters Forward – Cluster Business Connect* initiative, aiming to operationalise green and digital transitions through structured inter-cluster collaboration between the European Union and Southern Mediterranean ecosystems.

The initiative is grounded in the partnership between the ICONIC Cluster (Romania) and Cluster EnR (Morocco) and addresses shared regional challenges related to climate innovation, renewable energy, sustainable industrial practices – including the decarbonisation of industry – and digitalisation, with a particular emphasis on artificial intelligence. Rather than acting as a stand-alone project, *Sustainable Transitions Connect* functions as an enabling platform that links policy priorities, market needs and concrete business cooperation mechanisms across the Euromed region.

Strategic rationale

The Euromed region faces a dual transition imperative: accelerating climate neutrality while strengthening industrial competitiveness and regional resilience. Fragmentation of innovation ecosystems, limited cross-border collaboration and uneven access to markets and financing remain structural barriers, particularly for SMEs and emerging technology providers. *Sustainable Transitions Connect* responds to these challenges by creating structured interaction spaces where solution providers, industrial adopters, clusters and innovation intermediaries can jointly design, test and scale sustainable solutions.

Core objectives

The *Sustainable Transitions Connect* framework pursues three interrelated objectives:

1. Strengthening inter-cluster cooperation between EU and Southern Mediterranean actors, fostering long-term partnerships and formal cooperation frameworks.
2. Facilitating market access and innovation, enabling SMEs and cluster members to enter new Euromed markets through matchmaking, pilot collaborations and joint value-chain development.



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3. Accelerating sustainable transitions, by supporting the adoption of renewable energy solutions, decarbonisation technologies and AI-enabled digital solutions in industrial contexts.

Operational approach

The framework is implemented through a phased and integrated approach:

- Preparatory phase: ecosystem mapping, innovation needs assessment and stakeholder identification to build a shared evidence base.
- Matching phase: in-person and online matchmaking missions, co-design sessions and innovation showcases, translating strategic intent into concrete business partnerships and pilot projects.
- Follow-up phase: consolidation of partnerships, access to funding instruments, dissemination of tools and sustained collaboration beyond the project lifecycle.

This approach ensures that cooperation evolves from dialogue to implementation, and from isolated interactions to structured regional value chains.

Added value for the Euromed business community

Sustainable Transitions Connect provides tangible value for businesses and clusters by:

- enabling access to complementary markets and expertise across the EU–South Med divide;
- reducing entry barriers for SMEs in climate and digital innovation sectors;
- supporting the co-creation of bankable project ideas aligned with EU and regional funding priorities;
- fostering trust-based, culturally aware collaboration frameworks suited to the Euromed context.

Contribution to long-term regional impact

Beyond its immediate outputs, *Sustainable Transitions Connect* is designed as a replicable cooperation model. It contributes to strengthening Euro-Mediterranean innovation diplomacy, enhancing industrial resilience and supporting inclusive, sustainable growth across the region by embedding collaboration mechanisms that remain active beyond the project duration



Chapter 4

The role of clusters and inter-cluster cooperation in Euromed business development

4.1. Why clusters matter in the Euromed business landscape

Clusters have become a central operational instrument for economic development, innovation diffusion and internationalisation in the Euromed region. Unlike traditional business associations, clusters function as structured ecosystems that bring together companies, research organisations, public authorities and financial actors around shared sectoral or thematic priorities. According to the European Commission, cluster-based organisations play a decisive role in accelerating SME internationalisation, facilitating innovation adoption and reducing coordination and transaction costs in cross-border cooperation.

Empirical evidence from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform demonstrates that SMEs involved in cluster-led internationalisation initiatives are two to three times more likely to access foreign markets than non-clustered firms and exhibit higher innovation rates and stronger resilience during economic shocks. In the Euromed context, characterised by significant market asymmetries and institutional differences, clusters act as trust brokers and market translators, reducing uncertainty for businesses entering unfamiliar environments.

4.2. Clusters as intermediaries between policy and market

A defining characteristic of cluster-based cooperation lies in the ability to bridge policy frameworks and market realities. Clusters operate at the intersection of public policy priorities, private sector needs and research-driven knowledge generation. EU cooperation programmes increasingly rely on clusters to operationalise strategic objectives, mobilise SMEs that would otherwise lack access to EU-level initiatives and ensure dissemination and sustainability of project results.

Data from EU-funded programmes indicates that projects involving clusters as lead or core partners demonstrate higher SME participation rates, stronger post-project continuity and

improved dissemination of results across regions.²² For businesses, engagement through clusters significantly reduces the administrative and strategic burden associated with cross-border projects.

4.3. Inter-cluster cooperation as a driver of regional value chains

Inter-cluster cooperation represents a shift from isolated cluster activity toward networked ecosystems operating across borders. In the Euromed region, this model is particularly relevant for connecting European innovation supply with Southern Mediterranean industrial demand and regional market access channels. Inter-cluster initiatives facilitate joint mapping of value chains, identification of complementarities between regions and co-development of solutions adapted to local and regional needs.

OECD analysis on regional value chains indicates that firms embedded in networked ecosystems benefit from faster innovation diffusion and increased resilience to supply chain disruptions. Clusters provide the governance structures necessary to coordinate multiple actors, manage intellectual property considerations and ensure balanced distribution of roles and benefits.

4.4. Clusters as accelerators of SME participation

Despite their economic importance, SMEs face persistent barriers to internationalisation, including limited financial resources, lack of market intelligence, reduced negotiation power and insufficient visibility toward institutional partners. Cluster-based cooperation mitigates these barriers by aggregating SME demand and capabilities, providing access to shared services such as matchmaking, legal support and funding intelligence, and acting as credible intermediaries toward foreign partners.

According to the European Commission's SME Performance Review, SMEs participating in cluster-led projects report higher export readiness and lower perceived risk when entering new markets. In the Euromed region, this role is amplified by cultural and regulatory complexity, making clusters essential enablers of inclusive economic participation.²³

4.5. Governance and trust-building in cluster-based cooperation

²² European Commission, *Evaluation of Cluster Programmes and Cluster Excellence Initiatives; SME Performance Review*;

²³ European Commission, *SME Performance Review; European Cluster Panorama*



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Trust constitutes a critical factor in cross-border business collaboration, particularly in the Euromed region where business cultures differ significantly, institutional trust levels vary and legal enforcement mechanisms may be uneven. Clusters contribute to trust-building through accumulated reputational capital, structured governance mechanisms and transparent rules of engagement.

Typical governance instruments used in inter-cluster cooperation include Memoranda of Understanding, Letters of Intent, joint steering committees and shared codes of conduct. These instruments do not replace commercial contracts, but rather prepare the ground for them, allowing businesses to test cooperation in lower-risk environments before committing to long-term investments.

4.6. Evidence of impact and strategic implications

Multiple evaluations of EU cluster initiatives demonstrate that cluster-based cooperation outperforms standalone business support measures in terms of partnership sustainability, innovation uptake and market entry success. Higher conversion rates from networking to concrete partnerships, increased likelihood of joint innovation projects and stronger alignment with EU and regional policy objectives are consistently observed.²⁴

For businesses and clusters operating in the Euromed region, the implications are clear. Cluster engagement should be viewed as a strategic investment rather than a peripheral activity, inter-cluster cooperation offers a low-risk pathway to market access and innovation, and SMEs benefit disproportionately from cluster-led initiatives. As a result, companies seeking to operate in the Euromed region are increasingly expected – not merely encouraged – to engage through structured cluster ecosystems.

Chapter 5

Business culture and regulatory realities in the Euromed region

5.1. Business culture as a strategic variable in the Euromed region

In the Euromed region, business culture constitutes a strategic variable rather than a secondary contextual factor. Cross-border cooperation between European Union actors and Southern

²⁴ European Commission, *European Cluster Excellence Initiative and Evaluation of Cluster Programmes and Cluster Policies*;





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Mediterranean partners unfolds in an environment marked by significant differences in communication styles, decision-making processes, perceptions of time, hierarchy and risk. These differences do not represent obstacles per se, but they profoundly influence the pace, structure and outcomes of business interactions.

European business culture is generally characterised by a strong emphasis on formal procedures, contractual clarity, predictable timelines and institutional accountability. Decision-making processes tend to be codified, documentation-heavy and anchored in organisational roles rather than personal relationships. In contrast, in many Southern Mediterranean contexts, business interactions are more relationally driven, with trust, personal credibility and long-term interpersonal engagement playing a central role in shaping commercial decisions. Negotiations often evolve gradually, and informal consensus-building may precede formal commitments.

For businesses operating in the Euromed region, success depends on the ability to navigate these cultural logics simultaneously. Relying exclusively on formal contractual approaches may be perceived as premature or rigid in South Med contexts, while excessive informality may raise concerns regarding reliability and governance from a European perspective. Effective actors are those capable of combining procedural discipline with relational intelligence, adapting their engagement strategies without compromising professional standards.

5.2. Time, hierarchy and decision-making dynamics

Perceptions of time and hierarchy represent some of the most consequential cultural differences affecting Euromed business cooperation. In European business environments, timelines are typically structured around predefined milestones, deliverables and reporting obligations, often linked to funding frameworks or regulatory compliance. Delays are generally perceived as inefficiencies or risks that require formal justification.

In Southern Mediterranean contexts, time is more frequently perceived as flexible and adaptive, particularly during early stages of partnership building. Decision-making may involve multiple layers of consultation, including senior leadership, family-owned governance structures or public authorities, even when these are not formally indicated in organisational charts. This can result in longer negotiation phases, which should not be interpreted as lack of interest, but rather as a process of internal alignment and trust validation.²⁵

²⁵ European Commission, *Better Regulation Guidelines* and *EU Project Management and Reporting Frameworks*; OECD, *Trust and Public Governance*





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Understanding these dynamics is essential for realistic planning. Projects that fail to account for extended consensus-building phases or that impose rigid timelines without contextual adaptation often encounter friction. Conversely, initiatives that integrate buffer periods, iterative engagement and repeated face-to-face interactions tend to achieve more sustainable outcomes.

5.3. Trust, negotiation and relationship-building

Trust occupies a central position in Euromed business culture, particularly in cross-border contexts characterised by regulatory diversity and varying enforcement capacities. In many Southern Mediterranean markets, trust is established primarily through repeated interactions, personal recommendations and demonstrated commitment over time. Initial meetings are frequently exploratory and relational, serving to assess intentions and compatibility rather than to conclude immediate transactions.

Negotiation processes therefore tend to be incremental, with commercial terms refined progressively as mutual confidence develops. This approach contrasts with the European preference for early specification of contractual conditions, risk allocation and performance indicators. Misalignment between these approaches can lead to misunderstandings if not explicitly managed.

For European businesses, investing time in relationship-building should be understood not as a cost, but as a strategic investment that reduces long-term transaction risk. For Southern Mediterranean partners, engagement with European counterparts often involves adapting to higher expectations regarding documentation, compliance and transparency. Successful partnerships emerge where both sides recognise these expectations and consciously work toward convergence.²⁶

5.4. Regulatory diversity and institutional complexity

Beyond cultural considerations, the Euromed region is characterised by significant regulatory heterogeneity. While European Union member states operate within a harmonised regulatory framework grounded in EU law, Southern Mediterranean countries exhibit diverse legal systems, administrative practices and enforcement mechanisms. Regulatory environments may differ substantially across sectors, particularly in areas such as energy, environment, public procurement and foreign investment.

²⁶ European Commission, *A New Agenda for the Mediterranean*; OECD, *Trust and Business Integrity and International Business Cooperation* analyses





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European companies entering South Med markets often encounter regulatory complexity related to licensing procedures, local content requirements, customs processes or sector-specific authorisations. Conversely, South Med companies engaging with EU partners must navigate stringent regulatory requirements related to product standards, environmental compliance, data protection and competition rules.

This asymmetry places a premium on regulatory literacy and local expertise. Businesses that rely exclusively on generic legal frameworks or external consultants without local anchoring frequently underestimate procedural timelines and compliance costs. In contrast, partnerships that integrate local regulatory knowledge from the outset are better positioned to anticipate constraints and identify workable solutions.

5.5. The role of intermediaries in navigating regulatory realities

Given the complexity of the regulatory landscape, intermediaries play a critical role in facilitating Euromed business cooperation. Clusters, chambers of commerce, investment agencies and specialised support organisations act as institutional bridges, translating regulatory requirements into operational guidance and reducing information asymmetries between partners.

Clusters, in particular, provide added value by combining sector-specific expertise with policy awareness and established relationships with public authorities. Their involvement can significantly accelerate administrative procedures, facilitate dialogue with regulators and enhance credibility in the eyes of institutional stakeholders. For SMEs, which often lack internal regulatory capacity, such intermediary support is particularly valuable.

EU-funded programmes increasingly recognise this role and actively encourage the involvement of intermediary organisations in cross-border projects, not only as facilitators, but as governance actors contributing to project sustainability and compliance.

5.6. Risk perception and compliance cultures

Risk perception varies considerably across the Euromed region and influences both strategic decisions and operational behaviour. European companies tend to adopt formalised risk management approaches, supported by compliance systems, internal audits and legal safeguards. In Southern Mediterranean contexts, risk is more often managed through relational mechanisms, flexibility and adaptive problem-solving, particularly in environments where regulatory enforcement may be uneven.





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These differing approaches can generate friction, especially in joint projects where responsibilities, liabilities and performance expectations must be clearly defined. Addressing this challenge requires explicit discussion of risk allocation, transparency regarding constraints and the establishment of shared governance mechanisms that combine formal compliance with pragmatic flexibility.

5.7. Implications for businesses operating in the Euromed region

The interplay between business culture and regulatory realities in the Euromed region has direct implications for companies and clusters seeking to engage in cross-border cooperation. Cultural intelligence, regulatory awareness and the ability to work through intermediaries are not auxiliary skills, but core strategic capabilities. Businesses that invest in understanding local contexts, adapt their engagement styles and integrate regulatory considerations early in project design are significantly more likely to achieve sustainable outcomes.

Ultimately, the Euromed region rewards actors capable of balancing structure with adaptability, formal compliance with relational trust and strategic ambition with operational realism. Recognising business culture and regulation as interdependent dimensions of cooperation is therefore essential for long-term success.

5.8. Common pitfalls in Euromed business cooperation and mitigation strategies

Despite the strategic potential of the Euromed region, a significant number of cross-border business initiatives underperform or stall due to recurrent and largely predictable challenges. These difficulties rarely stem from a lack of market potential or technological capability, but rather from misalignment between expectations, cultural assumptions and regulatory realities.

One of the most common pitfalls is the over-formalisation of early-stage cooperation. European companies, accustomed to operating in highly regulated environments, often attempt to impose detailed contractual structures, rigid timelines and predefined deliverables at the outset of collaboration. In Southern Mediterranean contexts, this approach can be perceived as premature or as a signal of low trust, particularly when relational foundations have not yet been established. Mitigation requires a phased engagement strategy, in which early interactions focus on mutual understanding, credibility-building and alignment of interests, while formal contractual arrangements are progressively introduced as confidence develops.





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A second recurring challenge relates to misinterpretation of decision-making timelines. European partners frequently interpret prolonged negotiation or delayed responses as lack of commitment, while Southern Mediterranean partners may view pressure for rapid decisions as disregard for internal consultation processes. This divergence often leads to frustration and erosion of trust. Effective mitigation involves explicit discussion of decision-making processes and internal governance structures at an early stage, combined with realistic project planning that incorporates buffer periods and iterative validation steps.

Regulatory underestimation represents another critical pitfall. Companies entering the Euromed space frequently assume either regulatory equivalence or straightforward transposition of European standards, particularly in sectors such as energy, environment or digital services. In practice, regulatory frameworks in Southern Mediterranean countries can differ substantially in terms of procedures, enforcement and institutional responsibilities. Conversely, South Med companies may underestimate the complexity of EU regulatory compliance, especially regarding environmental standards, data protection and product certification. Mitigation requires early regulatory mapping, involvement of local expertise and, where possible, the use of intermediary organisations such as clusters or investment agencies to anticipate constraints and identify compliant pathways.

A further source of difficulty arises from asymmetric risk perception and risk management cultures. European companies often rely on formal compliance mechanisms, insurance instruments and legal safeguards, while Southern Mediterranean partners may prioritise flexibility and relational problem-solving. When these approaches are not reconciled, joint projects may suffer from ambiguity regarding responsibilities and liabilities. Mitigation strategies include the establishment of shared governance frameworks that combine formal compliance requirements with adaptive operational arrangements, as well as transparent discussion of risk allocation from the outset.

Finally, many initiatives fail due to insufficient post-project continuity planning. EU-funded or pilot-based collaborations frequently conclude without a clear pathway toward commercialisation, scale-up or long-term partnership. This results in lost momentum and underutilised investments. Effective mitigation involves integrating sustainability and scalability considerations into project design from the beginning, including identification of follow-up financing options, market expansion strategies and long-term partnership models.

5.9. Translating cultural and regulatory awareness into operational advantage





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When adequately managed, the cultural and regulatory specificities of the Euromed region can be transformed from perceived barriers into sources of competitive advantage. Companies that demonstrate cultural intelligence, regulatory awareness and adaptability are better positioned to build durable partnerships, access institutional support and navigate complex markets. Clusters and intermediary organisations play a crucial role in this process by providing structured environments for experimentation, learning and trust-building.

Rather than seeking to eliminate differences, successful Euromed actors learn to work with them strategically. By aligning engagement styles, managing expectations transparently and embedding regulatory considerations into business models, companies can significantly increase the probability of sustainable success in the Euromed region.

Chapter 6

Market entry strategies and access modalities in the Euromed region

6.1. Rethinking market entry in the Euromed context

Market entry in the Euromed region cannot be approached through standardised expansion templates typically used in single-market environments. The structural diversity of the region, combined with cultural, regulatory and institutional asymmetries, requires a contextualised and adaptive approach. Successful market entry strategies in the Euromed space are rarely linear; instead, they evolve through iterative engagement, progressive commitment and continuous learning.

For European companies, the Euromed region often represents a hybrid space situated between familiar regulatory environments and emerging market dynamics. For Southern Mediterranean companies, engagement with EU markets entails navigating highly structured compliance regimes and competitive ecosystems. In both cases, market entry should be understood as a process of integration into a regional ecosystem, rather than as a one-off transactional step.

6.2. Export-based entry and its limitations





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Export remains the most common initial mode of market entry in the Euromed region, particularly for SMEs seeking to test demand while limiting financial exposure. Export-based approaches allow companies to assess market receptivity, price sensitivity and logistical feasibility without committing to local infrastructure or long-term contractual obligations.

However, in the Euromed context, pure export models often reach structural limits relatively quickly. Regulatory barriers, localisation requirements, customs procedures and the need for after-sales support can erode competitiveness. Moreover, export-only approaches may be perceived as transactional and insufficiently committed by local partners, especially in sectors where trust, continuity and local presence are critical. As a result, export is best understood as an exploratory phase rather than a sustainable long-term strategy.

6.3. Strategic partnerships and local representation

Strategic partnerships with local actors represent one of the most effective access modalities in the Euromed region. These partnerships can take multiple forms, ranging from commercial representation agreements and distribution partnerships to technical cooperation and co-development arrangements. Local partners provide critical assets, including market intelligence, regulatory familiarity, access to networks and cultural mediation.

The success of such partnerships depends less on formal structure and more on alignment of incentives, clarity of roles and mutual commitment. Partnerships that are established solely to satisfy formal requirements often remain superficial and underperform. In contrast, partnerships built around shared value creation – such as joint solution adaptation, pilot implementation or market co-development – tend to generate stronger and more durable outcomes.

6.4. Joint ventures and co-production models

In sectors characterised by high capital intensity, regulatory complexity or strong localisation requirements, joint ventures and co-production models offer a viable pathway to deeper market integration. These arrangements enable risk-sharing, local anchoring and alignment with national industrial strategies, particularly in areas such as energy, infrastructure and advanced manufacturing.

Within the Euromed region, joint ventures are often facilitated by public policy incentives aimed at attracting foreign investment and strengthening domestic value chains. However, they also require a high degree of governance maturity, transparency and long-term strategic alignment. Successful joint ventures typically emerge after an initial phase of collaboration, rather than as





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an entry point, and are supported by robust legal frameworks and clearly defined decision-making mechanisms.

6.5. Pilot projects as gateways to market access

Pilot projects occupy a central position in Euromed market entry strategies, particularly in innovation-driven sectors. Pilots allow companies to demonstrate technical feasibility, adapt solutions to local conditions and build credibility with stakeholders, while limiting financial and reputational risk. In many cases, pilot implementation serves as a prerequisite for larger commercial contracts or public procurement opportunities.

EU-funded and cluster-supported initiatives frequently use pilot projects as structured entry mechanisms, combining financial support with institutional endorsement. For businesses, participation in such pilots offers dual benefits: access to market validation and alignment with policy priorities. Importantly, pilots should be designed from the outset with scalability in mind, including clear pathways toward commercialisation and long-term deployment.

6.6. The role of clusters and intermediaries in market access

Clusters and intermediary organisations play a decisive role in shaping effective market entry strategies in the Euromed region. By aggregating demand, facilitating matchmaking and providing regulatory and cultural mediation, clusters reduce entry barriers and transaction costs, particularly for SMEs. They also enhance credibility vis-à-vis local authorities, industrial partners and investors.

Cluster-led market entry initiatives often outperform individual company efforts because they embed businesses within a broader ecosystem. This collective approach enables shared learning, risk pooling and stronger negotiating positions. For companies unfamiliar with the Euromed context, cluster engagement offers a structured and lower-risk pathway to market access.

6.7. Public procurement and institutional markets

Public procurement represents a significant, yet complex, access modality in the Euromed region, especially in sectors linked to energy transition, infrastructure and public services. While procurement frameworks differ widely across countries, institutional markets often offer scale, stability and long-term demand.





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Accessing public procurement requires a thorough understanding of national regulations, tendering procedures and eligibility criteria. Partnerships with local actors and intermediary support are frequently essential to navigate these processes. For European companies, aligning solutions with national development priorities and demonstrating local value creation significantly increases success rates.

6.8. Risk management and adaptive market entry pathways

Market entry in the Euromed region inevitably involves multiple layers of risk, including regulatory uncertainty, currency exposure, political volatility and operational challenges. Effective strategies do not seek to eliminate these risks, but to manage them through phased engagement, diversification of partnerships and continuous reassessment.

Adaptive market entry pathways typically involve a progression from exploratory engagement to deeper integration, allowing companies to adjust their level of commitment as knowledge and trust increase. This approach aligns with the relational and institutional realities of the Euromed region and enhances long-term sustainability.

6.9. Strategic implications for businesses

The diversity of market entry modalities in the Euromed region underscores the need for strategic flexibility and contextual intelligence. Businesses that succeed are those that select access modalities aligned with sectoral characteristics, regulatory environments and partnership capacities, rather than relying on one-size-fits-all models. Export, partnerships, joint ventures and pilot projects should be viewed as complementary tools within a broader strategic pathway.

Ultimately, effective market entry in the Euromed region is less about speed and more about positioning. Companies that invest in understanding local contexts, build trust progressively and leverage ecosystem-based support structures are best placed to convert initial access into sustainable market presence.

Chapter 7

Financing mechanisms and funding pathways for Euromed business initiatives

7.1. Financing as a strategic dimension of Euromed cooperation





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In the Euromed region, access to finance represents not merely an operational requirement, but a strategic dimension that shapes the design, scale and sustainability of business initiatives. Unlike purely market-driven environments, Euromed cooperation operates at the intersection of public policy objectives, development priorities and private sector interests. As a result, financing mechanisms are closely aligned with strategic goals related to sustainability, digitalisation, industrial resilience and inclusive growth.

For businesses and clusters, understanding the logic underpinning available funding instruments is essential. Financing in the Euromed context is rarely neutral; it is designed to incentivise collaboration, cross-border partnerships and measurable impact. Companies that approach financing as an integral part of their strategic positioning – rather than as an afterthought – are significantly better placed to mobilise resources and scale their activities.

7.2. European Union funding instruments and their relevance for businesses

European Union funding constitutes a central pillar of financing for Euromed business initiatives. Programmes targeting innovation, sustainability and regional cooperation increasingly extend their scope to include Southern Mediterranean partners, either directly or through neighbourhood and external action instruments. These programmes typically prioritise collaborative projects involving multiple actors, including businesses, clusters, research organisations and public authorities.

From a business perspective, EU funding offers several advantages beyond direct financial support. Participation in EU-funded initiatives enhances credibility, facilitates access to institutional networks and provides structured frameworks for pilot implementation and market validation. However, EU funding also entails specific requirements related to compliance, reporting and impact measurement. Businesses must therefore balance the benefits of funding access with the organisational capacity required to manage complex administrative obligations.

7.3. Neighbourhood, development and international cooperation finance

In addition to mainstream EU programmes, a range of neighbourhood and development-oriented instruments play a critical role in financing Euromed initiatives. These instruments are designed to support economic development, energy transition and private sector growth in Southern Mediterranean countries, often through blended finance approaches that combine grants, loans and guarantees.





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Development finance institutions and multilateral banks operating in the region increasingly prioritise private sector engagement, recognising the role of businesses in delivering sustainable development outcomes. For companies, particularly those involved in energy, infrastructure or industrial modernisation, these instruments offer access to larger-scale financing than traditional innovation grants. However, they also require robust project preparation, clear demonstration of developmental impact and alignment with national priorities.

7.4. National and regional funding schemes

National and regional funding schemes in both EU and Southern Mediterranean countries complement supranational instruments and can play a decisive role in project viability. These schemes often target specific sectors, such as renewable energy, digitalisation or SME support, and may be designed to co-finance initiatives supported at EU level.

For businesses, leveraging national and regional funding alongside EU instruments enables financial layering and risk diversification. However, coordination between different funding sources requires careful planning to avoid overlaps, compliance conflicts or double funding issues. Clusters and intermediary organisations frequently provide critical support in navigating these multi-level funding landscapes and aligning applications with relevant eligibility criteria.

7.5. Blended finance and private investment

Blended finance has emerged as a key mechanism for scaling Euromed business initiatives, particularly in capital-intensive sectors. By combining public funding with private investment, blended finance instruments aim to de-risk projects and attract commercial capital into areas perceived as high-risk or insufficiently mature.

In the Euromed region, blended finance is increasingly used to support renewable energy deployment, industrial decarbonisation and digital infrastructure projects. For businesses, engaging with blended finance mechanisms requires a shift in mindset from grant-driven logic to investment readiness. This includes the development of bankable business models, clear revenue streams and credible risk mitigation strategies.

Private investors, including venture capital funds, corporate investors and impact investors, are progressively active in the region, particularly where projects demonstrate scalability and alignment with sustainability objectives. Businesses that can articulate a compelling value proposition combining commercial viability and impact are better positioned to attract such investment.





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7.6. The role of clusters and intermediaries in financing access

Clusters and intermediary organisations play a crucial role in facilitating access to finance in the Euromed region. By aggregating project pipelines, providing funding intelligence and supporting proposal development, clusters lower entry barriers for SMEs and enhance the quality of funding applications. Their involvement also signals credibility to funders, particularly in cross-border contexts where trust and track record are essential.

Cluster-led initiatives often act as platforms for financial matchmaking, connecting businesses with public funders, development finance institutions and private investors. For SMEs with limited internal capacity, such support can be decisive in transforming innovative ideas into financed projects.





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7.7. From funding to financial sustainability

A recurrent challenge in Euromed cooperation lies in the transition from funded projects to financially sustainable business activities. Too many initiatives conclude at the end of the funding period without a clear pathway toward commercialisation or scale-up. Addressing this challenge requires integrating financial sustainability considerations into project design from the outset.

This includes identifying post-project revenue models, exploring follow-up investment opportunities and aligning pilot activities with long-term market demand. Businesses that treat funding as a catalyst rather than as an end goal are more likely to convert initial support into durable market presence.

7.8. Strategic implications for businesses and clusters

Financing pathways in the Euromed region reward strategic coherence, partnership capacity and long-term vision. Businesses and clusters that align their initiatives with policy priorities, leverage multiple funding sources and engage early with intermediaries significantly increase their chances of success. Conversely, initiatives that pursue funding opportunistically, without clear strategic anchoring, often struggle to achieve impact or sustainability.

Ultimately, effective financing strategies in the Euromed region are those that combine public and private resources, integrate financial planning into business strategy and support the progressive scaling of innovation and market engagement.

Chapter 8

Innovation pathways, pilot implementation and scaling in the Euromed region

8.1. Innovation in the Euromed region: from concept to deployment

Innovation in the Euromed region rarely follows a linear trajectory from research to market. Instead, it unfolds through iterative pathways shaped by regulatory constraints, market readiness, institutional capacity and cultural dynamics. For businesses and clusters, innovation should therefore be understood not merely as technological development, but as a process of



progressive alignment between solution design, user needs, policy priorities and implementation environments.

In the European Union, innovation ecosystems are characterised by structured research and development frameworks, strong intellectual property protection and access to public funding instruments. In Southern Mediterranean countries, innovation dynamics are more frequently driven by practical problem-solving, infrastructure needs and rapid deployment imperatives. The interaction between these two models creates opportunities for applied innovation, where European technological capabilities are adapted and validated in South Med contexts with high demand and real-world constraints.

Successful innovation pathways in the Euromed region are those that consciously bridge these logics, combining upstream innovation capacity with downstream deployment potential.

8.2. The strategic role of pilot projects

Pilot projects occupy a central position in Euromed innovation pathways, functioning as both technical validation tools and trust-building mechanisms. For businesses entering new markets or sectors, pilots provide a controlled environment in which solutions can be tested, adapted and demonstrated without the full exposure associated with large-scale commercial deployment.

In many Euromed contexts, pilot implementation is not simply a preliminary step, but a necessary condition for market access. Public authorities, industrial partners and investors often require tangible proof of performance under local conditions before committing to procurement contracts or long-term partnerships. EU-funded programmes and cluster-led initiatives frequently integrate pilot phases precisely for this reason, recognising their role in reducing perceived risk and accelerating adoption.

However, pilot projects only deliver strategic value when they are embedded within a broader innovation and commercialisation logic. Pilots designed as isolated experiments, without clear pathways toward scale, tend to generate limited impact and dissipate momentum once funding ends.

8.3. Adapting innovation to local contexts

A recurrent challenge in Euromed innovation initiatives lies in the adaptation of solutions to diverse local conditions. Technologies developed in European contexts often assume specific regulatory frameworks, infrastructure standards or user behaviours that may not be fully



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transferable to Southern Mediterranean environments. Conversely, locally developed solutions may require significant upgrading to meet EU regulatory or market expectations.

Effective innovation pathways therefore prioritise contextual adaptation from the outset. This includes adjusting technical specifications, business models and operational processes to local realities, as well as involving end-users and local stakeholders early in the innovation cycle. Co-creation approaches, supported by clusters and intermediary organisations, are particularly effective in aligning innovation outputs with actual market needs.

Such adaptive innovation not only increases the likelihood of successful deployment, but also enhances the scalability and transferability of solutions across the wider Euromed region.

8.4. Scaling innovation beyond pilot phases

Scaling represents one of the most critical and challenging stages of Euromed innovation pathways. While pilot projects are relatively well supported through public funding and institutional backing, the transition to commercial scale often exposes gaps in financing, governance and market access.

Scaling requires a shift from experimental logic to operational and commercial discipline. This involves securing follow-up financing, formalising partnerships, strengthening supply chains and aligning with regulatory requirements at scale. For many businesses, particularly SMEs, this transition constitutes a major barrier, as it demands resources and capabilities that exceed those required for pilot implementation.

In the Euromed region, successful scaling strategies frequently rely on phased expansion, beginning with replication in similar contexts before broader regional rollout. Clusters play a crucial role in this process by facilitating replication across member networks, supporting matchmaking with new partners and providing platforms for dissemination and visibility.

8.5. Intellectual property, data and knowledge management

Innovation and scaling in the Euromed region raise important considerations related to intellectual property, data ownership and knowledge sharing. Cross-border collaboration often involves joint development, shared datasets and co-created solutions, which require clear governance arrangements to avoid conflict and ensure fair value distribution.





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European partners typically operate within robust intellectual property regimes, while practices in Southern Mediterranean contexts may be more heterogeneous. Establishing clear agreements regarding ownership, licensing and usage rights early in the innovation process is therefore essential. Equally important is the management of data, particularly in digital and AI-enabled solutions, where compliance with EU data protection standards may influence solution design and deployment.

Transparent and balanced IP and data governance frameworks not only protect partners' interests, but also enhance trust and facilitate long-term cooperation.

8.6. The role of ecosystems in innovation scaling

Innovation scaling in the Euromed region is rarely achieved by individual firms acting in isolation. Ecosystem-based approaches, involving clusters, research institutions, public authorities and financial actors, significantly increase the probability of success. These ecosystems provide access to complementary capabilities, shared infrastructure and coordinated support mechanisms that individual firms often lack.

Clusters, in particular, function as scaling platforms by aggregating demand, coordinating replication efforts and aligning innovation trajectories with policy and funding priorities. Their involvement also enhances credibility vis-à-vis investors and public authorities, facilitating access to larger markets and institutional buyers.

For businesses, embedding innovation initiatives within such ecosystems transforms scaling from an individual challenge into a collective process.

8.7. Measuring impact and learning from implementation

A defining feature of contemporary Euromed innovation initiatives is the emphasis on measurable impact. Funders, policymakers and partners increasingly require evidence of economic, environmental and social outcomes, not only as accountability measures, but as inputs for strategic learning.

Systematic monitoring and evaluation enable businesses to refine solutions, demonstrate value and strengthen their positioning for future funding or investment. Impact measurement should therefore be integrated into innovation pathways from the outset, rather than treated as a reporting obligation at the end of projects.



Learning-oriented approaches, which use pilot and scaling experiences to inform continuous improvement, contribute to the long-term robustness of innovation initiatives in the Euromed region.

8.8. Strategic implications for businesses and clusters

Innovation pathways in the Euromed region reward strategic patience, adaptability and ecosystem engagement. Businesses and clusters that view pilots as gateways rather than endpoints, prioritise contextual adaptation and plan for scaling from the outset are significantly more likely to achieve sustainable outcomes. Conversely, initiatives that remain confined to experimental phases or neglect governance and financing considerations often struggle to progress beyond initial success.

Ultimately, the Euromed region offers a fertile environment for applied innovation, provided that innovation is approached as a process of integration between technology, market, policy and partnership dynamics.

Chapter 9

Risk management, compliance and operational resilience in the Euromed region

9.1. Risk as a structural feature of Euromed cooperation

Operating in the Euromed region inevitably exposes businesses and clusters to a complex risk landscape shaped by geopolitical dynamics, regulatory diversity, market volatility and institutional asymmetries. Risk in this context should not be interpreted solely as a threat to be avoided, but as a structural feature of cross-border cooperation that must be actively managed and strategically integrated into decision-making processes.

Unlike single-market environments, where risks are often internalised through stable regulatory and institutional frameworks, Euromed initiatives operate across multiple jurisdictions with differing levels of predictability and enforcement. As a result, effective risk management becomes a prerequisite for sustainable engagement rather than a reactive function activated only in moments of crisis.

9.2. Regulatory and compliance-related risks



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Regulatory risk constitutes one of the most significant challenges for businesses operating across the Euromed region. European companies engaging with Southern Mediterranean markets frequently encounter regulatory uncertainty related to licensing procedures, sector-specific authorisations, customs regulations and public procurement rules. These challenges are compounded by variations in administrative capacity and enforcement practices across countries and sectors.

Conversely, Southern Mediterranean companies collaborating with European partners must comply with stringent EU regulatory regimes, particularly in areas such as environmental standards, product safety, competition law and data protection. Failure to anticipate and address these requirements early in project design can lead to delays, additional costs or exclusion from markets.

Managing regulatory risk therefore requires proactive regulatory mapping, early engagement with competent authorities and continuous monitoring of regulatory developments. Partnerships that integrate regulatory expertise – either internally or through intermediaries such as clusters and specialised support organisations – are significantly better positioned to navigate compliance challenges.

9.3. Political and macroeconomic risks

Political and macroeconomic risks represent an additional layer of complexity in the Euromed region. Changes in government priorities, public policy orientation or geopolitical relations can directly affect market conditions, funding availability and regulatory stability. Currency fluctuations, inflationary pressures and fiscal constraints may further influence project viability, particularly in long-term or capital-intensive initiatives.

While such risks cannot be eliminated, they can be mitigated through diversification strategies, phased investment approaches and contractual arrangements that allow for flexibility and adjustment. Businesses that adopt a long-term perspective and avoid overexposure to single markets or partners are better able to absorb macro-level shocks and maintain operational continuity.

9.4. Operational and implementation risks

Operational risks arise from the practical challenges of implementing projects across borders, including logistical constraints, supply chain disruptions, skills shortages and differences in





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operational standards. In the Euromed region, these risks are often amplified by infrastructure disparities and administrative complexity.

Implementation delays frequently occur when project timelines fail to account for permitting processes, procurement cycles or local capacity constraints. Addressing these risks requires realistic planning, contingency buffers and close coordination with local partners. Pilot-based approaches and phased implementation models are particularly effective in identifying operational bottlenecks before full-scale deployment.

9.5. Compliance cultures and organisational alignment

Differences in compliance cultures can generate friction in Euromed partnerships. European organisations typically operate within formalised compliance frameworks supported by internal controls, audits and reporting mechanisms. In contrast, compliance practices in some Southern Mediterranean contexts may rely more heavily on informal arrangements and relational trust, particularly in environments where regulatory enforcement is uneven.

These differences necessitate explicit alignment of compliance expectations and responsibilities. Establishing shared compliance frameworks, clear reporting procedures and joint oversight mechanisms helps to prevent misunderstandings and ensures accountability. Importantly, such frameworks should be designed to balance formal requirements with operational feasibility, avoiding excessive administrative burdens that could undermine collaboration.

9.6. Building operational resilience through partnerships

Operational resilience in the Euromed region is closely linked to the quality and structure of partnerships. Strong partnerships enable risk-sharing, collective problem-solving and adaptive responses to unforeseen challenges. Clusters and intermediary organisations play a crucial role in fostering such resilience by providing coordination platforms, facilitating knowledge exchange and supporting crisis management when disruptions occur.

Resilient partnerships are characterised by transparent communication, mutual understanding of constraints and a willingness to adapt strategies in response to changing conditions. Rather than relying solely on contractual safeguards, resilient collaborations invest in relational capital and shared governance arrangements that support long-term stability.

9.7. Risk management as a dynamic capability





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In the Euromed context, risk management should be understood as a dynamic organisational capability rather than a static set of procedures. Continuous risk assessment, learning from implementation experiences and iterative adjustment of strategies are essential for maintaining relevance and competitiveness.

Projects that integrate risk management into their governance structures – from strategic planning to operational execution – are more likely to withstand external shocks and sustain performance over time. This dynamic approach also enhances credibility with funders, investors and institutional partners, who increasingly assess risk management capacity as part of due diligence processes.

9.8. Strategic implications for businesses and clusters

Effective risk management, compliance and operational resilience constitute core strategic capabilities for businesses and clusters operating in the Euromed region. Actors that proactively identify risks, align compliance cultures and invest in resilient partnerships are better positioned to convert uncertainty into opportunity. Conversely, initiatives that underestimate the complexity of the Euromed risk landscape often encounter disruptions that undermine both performance and trust.

Ultimately, resilience in the Euromed region is not achieved through avoidance of risk, but through structured engagement, adaptive governance and sustained collaboration across borders.

Chapter 10

Impact measurement, sustainability and long-term value creation in the Euromed region

10.1. From activity-based outputs to impact-oriented outcomes

In the context of Euromed cooperation, the focus of business initiatives is progressively shifting from activity-based outputs toward impact-oriented outcomes. This evolution reflects broader changes in European and regional policy frameworks, where the success of projects and





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partnerships is no longer assessed solely on the basis of implementation or short-term results, but on their capacity to generate durable economic, environmental and social value.

For businesses and clusters, this shift implies a fundamental rethinking of how success is defined and measured. Deliverables such as completed pilots, signed agreements or implemented technologies, while necessary, are insufficient indicators of long-term relevance. Instead, emphasis is placed on outcomes such as market creation, emissions reduction, skills development, resilience of value chains and the sustainability of cross-border partnerships.

10.2. Measuring impact in a multi-dimensional environment

Impact measurement in the Euromed region is inherently multi-dimensional, reflecting the intersection of business objectives, policy priorities and development goals. Economic impact may include indicators related to revenue generation, job creation, export growth or productivity gains. Environmental impact often focuses on emissions reduction, energy efficiency improvements or increased renewable energy capacity. Social impact may encompass skills upgrading, inclusion of SMEs, gender balance or regional development effects.

The challenge for businesses lies in integrating these dimensions into coherent measurement frameworks that are both credible and manageable. Overly complex indicator systems risk becoming administrative burdens, while overly simplistic approaches fail to capture meaningful change. Effective impact measurement therefore balances rigour with practicality, selecting indicators that are directly linked to business models and decision-making processes.

10.3. Sustainability as a strategic design principle

Sustainability in the Euromed region should not be understood merely as environmental compliance or reporting, but as a strategic design principle embedded in business models and partnership structures. Projects that treat sustainability as an add-on or external requirement often struggle to maintain momentum once public funding or institutional support ends.

In contrast, initiatives that integrate sustainability into core value propositions – such as cost reduction through energy efficiency, risk mitigation through diversified supply chains or market differentiation through low-carbon solutions – are more likely to achieve long-term viability. This integration is particularly important in the Euromed context, where policy alignment and market relevance are closely intertwined.

10.4. Long-term value creation through ecosystem engagement





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Long-term value creation in the Euromed region is rarely achieved through isolated projects or bilateral transactions. Instead, it emerges through sustained engagement within ecosystems that combine businesses, clusters, research organisations, public authorities and financial actors. These ecosystems enable cumulative learning, replication of successful models and progressive scaling of impact.

For businesses, participating in such ecosystems enhances strategic positioning, increases visibility and facilitates access to follow-up opportunities. For clusters, ecosystem engagement reinforces their role as long-term facilitators of regional development and innovation diffusion. Value creation thus becomes a collective process, extending beyond individual project cycles.

10.5. Aligning impact measurement with funding and investment logic

Impact measurement increasingly influences access to funding and investment in the Euromed region. Public funders, development finance institutions and impact-oriented investors require credible evidence of outcomes and long-term potential. Businesses that can demonstrate measurable impact, learning capacity and scalability are better positioned to secure follow-up financing and attract private capital.

This alignment requires early consideration of impact pathways, including how pilot results will translate into market uptake, how partnerships will be sustained and how benefits will be distributed across regions. Impact measurement, when integrated into strategic planning, becomes a tool for value creation rather than a compliance exercise.



10.6. Strategic implications for businesses and clusters

For businesses and clusters operating in the Euromed region, impact measurement and sustainability are not peripheral concerns, but central determinants of long-term success. Actors that internalise impact logic, design for sustainability and engage in ecosystem-based value creation are more likely to remain relevant in an increasingly policy-driven and impact-conscious environment. Conversely, initiatives that focus narrowly on short-term outputs risk marginalisation once external support diminishes.

Chapter 11

Case studies and applied lessons from Euromed cooperation

11.1. The role of case-based learning in Euromed initiatives

Case studies play a critical role in translating strategic principles into actionable insights for businesses and clusters operating in the Euromed region. Given the diversity and complexity of regional contexts, abstract guidance alone is insufficient. Case-based learning enables actors to understand how cultural, regulatory, financial and operational factors interact in real-world situations and to identify patterns of success and failure.

The cases presented in this chapter are illustrative rather than exhaustive. They reflect recurring dynamics observed in EU–South Mediterranean cooperation initiatives, particularly in areas related to energy transition, digitalisation and cluster-led internationalisation.

11.2. Case study 1: Cluster-led renewable energy pilot as a market entry pathway

A European SME specialising in energy management systems sought to enter a Southern Mediterranean market characterised by high solar potential and growing industrial demand. Rather than pursuing direct export, the company engaged through a cluster-led initiative that brought together local industrial partners, a public energy agency and a research institution.

The collaboration began with a pilot project co-financed through an EU-supported programme, allowing the solution to be tested under local operating conditions. The pilot served multiple



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functions: technical validation, regulatory familiarisation and trust-building among partners. Following successful implementation, the pilot was scaled through commercial contracts with additional industrial sites, supported by blended finance mechanisms.

Key lessons from this case include the strategic value of cluster intermediation, the importance of pilots as credibility-building tools and the need to design pilots with clear scaling pathways from the outset.

11.3. Case study 2: Digitalisation and AI for industrial efficiency

In a second case, a consortium involving European technology providers and Southern Mediterranean manufacturing firms focused on deploying AI-based predictive maintenance solutions. Initial resistance from local firms, driven by concerns over data ownership and operational disruption, was addressed through phased implementation and transparent governance arrangements.

The project emphasised co-creation, with local engineers involved in adapting algorithms to specific production environments. Over time, demonstrable efficiency gains and cost savings reduced scepticism and facilitated broader adoption across the cluster network. The case illustrates the importance of addressing data governance early, investing in capacity-building and framing digitalisation in terms of tangible operational benefits.

11.4. Case study 3: SME internationalisation through inter-cluster cooperation

A group of SMEs from different EU member states aimed to access Southern Mediterranean markets but lacked the scale and visibility required for independent entry. Through an inter-cluster cooperation initiative, the SMEs participated in joint matchmaking events, shared market intelligence and coordinated pilot deployments.

This collective approach reduced individual risk, enhanced bargaining power and enabled the SMEs to present integrated solutions rather than fragmented offerings. Several partnerships evolved into long-term commercial relationships, demonstrating the effectiveness of inter-cluster models in supporting SME internationalisation.

11.5. Cross-cutting lessons learned





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Across cases, several cross-cutting lessons emerge. Successful Euromed initiatives are characterised by phased engagement, strong intermediary support, early attention to regulatory and cultural factors and clear pathways from pilots to scale. Trust-building and governance are as critical as technological excellence, and impact-oriented design enhances both funding access and market relevance.

Conversely, initiatives that underestimate contextual complexity, neglect post-project continuity or rely on purely transactional approaches are less likely to achieve sustainable outcomes.

11.6. Translating lessons into strategic practice

For businesses and clusters, the value of case-based learning lies in its capacity to inform strategic choices. By internalising lessons related to partnership design, market entry sequencing, risk management and scaling, actors can avoid recurrent pitfalls and accelerate learning curves. Case studies thus serve not only as illustrative examples, but as strategic resources for informed decision-making in the Euromed region.

Chapter 12

Practical toolkit and decision-support instruments for Euromed businesses

12.1. The role of practical tools in Euromed business decision-making

In a region as diverse and structurally complex as the Euromed space, strategic insight must be complemented by practical decision-support instruments. Businesses, clusters and intermediary organisations require tools that translate strategic principles into operational guidance, enabling informed choices across different stages of engagement. The purpose of this toolkit is not to standardise behaviour or impose predefined solutions, but to structure reflection, reduce uncertainty and enhance strategic coherence in cross-border decision-making.

Practical tools are particularly valuable for SMEs and first-time entrants to Euromed cooperation, for whom regulatory diversity, cultural asymmetries and financing complexity can constitute significant entry barriers. At the same time, the toolkit is equally relevant for more experienced actors seeking to reassess positioning, recalibrate partnerships or prepare the transition from pilot initiatives to scalable operations. When applied systematically, these tools





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function not only as diagnostic instruments, but also as learning mechanisms that strengthen organisational maturity, adaptability and resilience.



12.2. Overview of the toolkit instruments

The toolkit presented in this chapter consists of five complementary instruments, each addressing a critical decision point in Euromed engagement:

- a market readiness self-assessment,
- a strategic pathway selection tool,
- a partnership and stakeholder mapping instrument,
- a risk and compliance preparedness checklist,
- a pilot-to-scale transition planning tool.

Used individually, each instrument supports specific decisions. Used collectively, they form an integrated decision-support framework that reflects the iterative and non-linear nature of successful Euromed cooperation.

12.3. Euromed market readiness self-assessment

The first core instrument of the toolkit is the Euromed market readiness self-assessment, designed to help organisations evaluate their preparedness for engagement in the Euromed region. This assessment deliberately goes beyond traditional product–market fit analysis and incorporates organisational, regulatory, financial and partnership-related dimensions that are critical in cross-border contexts.

Key dimensions include the degree of alignment between the organisation’s value proposition and Euromed priorities related to sustainability and digitalisation, internal capacity to manage cross-border partnerships and compliance requirements, availability of financial and human resources for phased engagement, and openness to adapting products or business models to local conditions. Low readiness scores do not imply exclusion from Euromed engagement, but

rather signal the need for preparatory actions such as capacity-building, partnership development or participation in pilot-based initiatives.

12.4. Strategic pathway selection tool

Given the diversity of access modalities in the Euromed region, selecting an appropriate engagement pathway constitutes a strategic decision with long-term implications. The strategic pathway selection tool supports businesses in comparing different options – such as export-based entry, partnership-driven access, pilot projects, joint ventures or cluster-led initiatives – against criteria including risk exposure, investment requirements, time horizon and scalability.

Rather than promoting a single optimal pathway, the tool encourages a staged and adaptive approach, in which initial low-commitment actions generate learning, market insight and trust, informing subsequent decisions regarding deeper integration. This reflects the iterative logic of successful Euromed engagement and reduces the likelihood of premature or misaligned commitments.

12.5. Partnership and stakeholder mapping instrument

Effective cooperation in the Euromed region depends on identifying and engaging the right partners at the right moment. The partnership and stakeholder mapping instrument enables businesses and clusters to systematically identify relevant actors across the value chain, including industrial partners, clusters, public authorities, research organisations and financial intermediaries.

Beyond identification, the instrument supports analysis of stakeholder interests, influence and expectations, enabling more targeted and realistic engagement strategies. This is particularly important in environments where informal influence and relational dynamics play a decisive role in decision-making. Structured stakeholder mapping reduces reliance on ad hoc networking and enhances strategic clarity and coordination.

12.6. Risk and compliance preparedness checklist

Risk and compliance considerations must be integrated into operational planning from the outset of Euromed engagement. The risk and compliance preparedness checklist supports



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organisations in identifying potential regulatory, operational, financial and partnership-related risks associated with cross-border initiatives.

The checklist promotes early regulatory mapping, clarification of compliance responsibilities among partners and assessment of internal risk management capacity. By addressing these dimensions proactively, businesses can significantly reduce the likelihood of delays, non-compliance or reputational damage during implementation.

12.7. Pilot-to-scale transition planning tool

One of the most frequent weaknesses observed in Euromed initiatives lies in the transition from pilot projects to commercial scale. The pilot-to-scale transition planning tool assists organisations in articulating clear pathways from experimentation to sustainable market presence.

This includes defining success criteria for pilot phases, identifying follow-up financing options, assessing replication potential across regions and formalising partnership arrangements required for scale. When integrated into project design from the outset, this tool transforms pilot projects from isolated demonstrations into strategic stepping stones toward long-term deployment.

12.8. Visualisation and operationalisation of the toolkit instruments

Although articulated conceptually, the toolkit is intentionally designed to allow for a high degree of operational flexibility and visualisation. Each instrument can be translated into practical formats that facilitate internal reflection, collective decision-making and structured dialogue with partners, intermediaries or funders.

In practice, toolkit instruments can be implemented as checklists to verify minimum readiness conditions, self-assessment matrices to enable comparative evaluation across multiple dimensions, or scorecards that combine qualitative judgement with semi-quantitative indicators. These formats enhance accessibility, repeatability and collective ownership, enabling use in workshops, internal strategy sessions, cluster meetings or funding preparation processes. Importantly, visualisation does not alter the strategic logic of the toolkit, but strengthens transparency and disciplined decision-making.





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12.9. Example tool: Euromed Market Readiness Self-Assessment Matrix

To illustrate how the toolkit can be operationalised, this section presents the Euromed Market Readiness Self-Assessment Matrix, a structured instrument derived from the market readiness assessment described above.

Purpose

This matrix supports SMEs, clusters and intermediaries in assessing organisational readiness for engagement in the Euromed region prior to market entry, pilot participation or partnership formation.

Scoring scale

- 1 = Not prepared
- 2 = Limited readiness
- 3 = Moderate readiness
- 4 = Good readiness
- 5 = High readiness / best practice

Euromed Market Readiness Self-Assessment Matrix

Dimension	Guiding question	Score (1–5)	Key observations / evidence	Priority actions
Strategic alignment	Is the organisation’s value proposition aligned with Euromed priorities (sustainability, digitalisation, resilience)?			





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Market understanding	Does the organisation have a clear understanding of target markets, customers and sector dynamics in the Euromed region?
Regulatory compliance readiness	& Are regulatory requirements, standards and compliance obligations identified and internally managed?
Partnership capacity	Does the organisation have experience and internal processes for managing cross-border partnerships?
Organisational capability	Are governance structures, decision-making processes and project management capacities adequate for international cooperation?
Financial robustness	Are sufficient financial resources available to support phased engagement, pilots or co-investment?





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Human resources & skills Does the organisation have staff with international, intercultural and technical competencies relevant to the Euromed context?

Adaptability & localisation Is the organisation willing and able to adapt products, services or business models to local conditions?

Risk awareness & mitigation Are key operational, financial and partnership risks identified and mitigation measures defined?

Interpretation guidelines

- **Low and uneven scores** indicate a need for **preparatory actions**, such as capacity-building, partner search or participation in cluster-led pilots.
- **High variance across dimensions** signals **structural risk** (e.g. strong technology but weak compliance or financial capacity).
- **Strong partnership and adaptability scores** may compensate for limited initial market knowledge.
- **Low financial robustness** suggests indirect engagement pathways (clusters, funded pilots, joint initiatives) rather than direct market entry.





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Recommended follow-up actions

- Link results to the **Strategic Pathway Selection Tool** (Section 12.4) to identify suitable engagement modes.
- Use findings to populate the **Risk and Compliance Preparedness Checklist** (Section 12.6).
- Reapply the matrix after pilot phases to track progress and readiness evolution.

Use by clusters and intermediaries

Clusters and support organisations may:

- aggregate results across multiple SMEs,
- segment firms by readiness level,
- design differentiated support pathways,
- monitor learning and capability development over time

When applied periodically, the matrix functions as both a diagnostic tool and a learning instrument, supporting evidence-based decision-making and more sustainable Euromed engagement.

The matrix supports internal reflection, prioritisation and decision-making before market entry, pilot participation or partnership development. It enables organisations to assess readiness across key strategic and operational dimensions, identify critical gaps, prioritise preparatory actions and support evidence-based discussions with partners, clusters or funders. The matrix is intentionally simple in structure, yet sufficiently robust to capture the multidimensional nature of Euromed engagement.





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A five-point scoring scale is used, ranging from 1 (*not prepared*) to 5 (*highly prepared / best practice*), allowing for nuanced assessment rather than binary judgement. Dimensions typically assessed include strategic alignment, market understanding, regulatory and compliance readiness, partnership capacity, organisational capability, financial robustness, adaptability and risk awareness.

Interpretation focuses on imbalances rather than aggregate scores. High variance across dimensions signals structural risk, while consistently low scores indicate the need for a preparatory phase. Strong partnership and adaptability scores may compensate for limited initial market knowledge, whereas weak financial robustness usually suggests engagement through clusters, pilots or funded initiatives rather than direct market entry.

Clusters and intermediary organisations may aggregate results across multiple firms to segment SMEs by readiness level, tailor support measures and design phased engagement pathways. When applied periodically, the matrix can also function as a progress-tracking scorecard, documenting how readiness evolves following pilot participation, partnership development or capacity-building actions.

The matrix integrates seamlessly with other toolkit instruments, including the strategic pathway selection tool, the risk and compliance checklist and the pilot-to-scale planning tool, reinforcing the internal coherence of the toolkit as a whole.

12.10. Using the toolkit as a dynamic learning framework

The toolkit presented in this chapter is not intended for one-off application. Its value increases when used iteratively, allowing organisations and clusters to reassess assumptions, adapt strategies and capture learning over time. Applied collectively, the instruments form a dynamic decision-support framework that enhances strategic discipline while preserving flexibility in a complex and evolving Euromed environment.

Chapter 13

Policy recommendations and strategic outlook for the Euromed region





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13.1. Strengthening the policy–business interface

The future competitiveness of the Euromed region depends on the effectiveness of the interface between policy frameworks and business realities. While existing EU and regional instruments provide strong strategic direction, their impact is maximised when policies are designed with implementation capacity and business constraints in mind.

Policy frameworks should continue to prioritise collaborative, cross-border initiatives, but with increased emphasis on simplification, continuity and scalability. Reducing administrative complexity, aligning timelines across funding instruments and supporting post-project commercialisation would significantly enhance the attractiveness of Euromed cooperation for businesses.

13.2. Enhancing the role of clusters as systemic intermediaries

Clusters have demonstrated their value as intermediaries between policy and market, yet their potential remains underutilised in many contexts. Strengthening cluster capacities – particularly in Southern Mediterranean countries – should be a strategic priority. This includes investment in professionalisation, internationalisation skills and financial sustainability.

Policy support for inter-cluster cooperation should move beyond project-based funding toward longer-term frameworks that enable sustained ecosystem development. Such an approach would reinforce trust, reduce fragmentation and accelerate regional value chain integration.

13.3. Supporting SME scaling and investment readiness

While SMEs are central to Euromed economic strategies, they often face a structural gap between innovation support and investment readiness. Bridging this gap requires targeted measures that support SMEs in transitioning from pilot projects to scalable business models.

Policy instruments should therefore combine technical assistance, capacity-building and access to blended finance, ensuring that promising initiatives do not stagnate after initial success. Enhanced coordination between innovation funding and investment instruments would further strengthen scaling pathways.

13.4. Advancing regulatory convergence and mutual learning





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Regulatory diversity will remain a defining feature of the Euromed region, but opportunities exist to enhance convergence through dialogue, capacity-building and mutual learning. Sector-specific regulatory cooperation – particularly in energy, digitalisation and sustainability – can reduce uncertainty and facilitate cross-border deployment of solutions.

From a strategic perspective, regulatory convergence should be approached incrementally, focusing on practical alignment rather than full harmonisation. Businesses and clusters can play an active role in this process by providing feedback on regulatory bottlenecks and participating in policy consultations.

13.5. Strategic outlook: the Euromed region as an innovation and resilience corridor

Looking ahead, the Euromed region is well positioned to emerge as a key innovation and resilience corridor connecting Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Demographic dynamics, energy transition imperatives and geopolitical realignments are likely to reinforce its strategic relevance.

Realising this potential requires sustained commitment to cooperation, ecosystem-based approaches and long-term value creation. Businesses, clusters and policymakers share responsibility for shaping a Euromed space that is competitive, inclusive and resilient. Those actors capable of aligning strategy, partnership and impact will be best placed to benefit from the region's evolving opportunities.

Annex. References / Sources

This annex provides the primary policy, statistical and analytical sources underpinning the strategic, economic and operational arguments presented in this guide. Sources have been selected based on institutional credibility, relevance for the Euro-Mediterranean context and frequent use in EU policy design, programme implementation and evaluation.

A1. European Union policy frameworks and strategic documents





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European Commission. **The European Green Deal.** Core EU policy framework establishing climate neutrality by 2050, the green transition as a pillar of EU industrial strategy, and priority areas for investment and cooperation.

European Parliament and Council. **Regulation (EU) 2021/1119 – European Climate Law.** Legally binding framework setting the target of at least a 55% reduction in net greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 1990 levels.

European Commission. **Fit for 55 package.** Legislative instruments operationalising the EU's climate targets, with direct implications for energy-intensive industries and value chains.

European Commission. **EU Industrial Strategy** (updated editions). Strategic orientation on industrial resilience, strategic autonomy, SME integration, nearshoring and regional value chains.

European Commission. **A New Agenda for the Mediterranean.** Policy framework governing EU cooperation with Southern Mediterranean countries, including green and digital transitions and private-sector engagement.

European Commission. **Shaping Europe's Digital Future** and **Digital Decade Policy Programme.** Frameworks positioning digitalisation and artificial intelligence as cross-cutting enablers of competitiveness and sustainability.





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A2. Macroeconomic, trade and demographic statistics

Eurostat. **National Accounts and GDP Statistics.**

Authoritative source on EU economic structure, industrial contribution and productivity.

Eurostat. **International and External Trade Statistics.**

Evidence on EU trade composition, including the predominance of intermediate goods in trade with neighbouring regions.

World Bank. **World Development Indicators (WDI).**

Primary dataset for population, SME structure, employment and investment indicators in Southern Mediterranean and MENA economies.

World Bank. **MENA Economic Update** (regular editions).

Analysis of macroeconomic trends, industrial development and private-sector dynamics in the region.

A3. Energy transition, climate and renewables

International Energy Agency (IEA). **World Energy Outlook.**

Reference source on energy demand, industrial energy consumption and transition scenarios in the EU and neighbouring regions.

International Energy Agency (IEA). **Africa Energy Outlook.**

Projections for energy demand growth driven by population, urbanisation and industrialisation in North Africa and Mediterranean-adjacent economies.

International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA). **Renewable Capacity Statistics.**

Primary source confirming the more-than-fivefold increase in renewable energy capacity in the MENA region since 2010 and the rapid growth of solar energy.

European Environment Agency (EEA). **Trends and Projections in Europe.**

Official EU data on greenhouse gas emissions by sector and progress toward climate targets.



A4. Digitalisation, artificial intelligence and productivity

European Commission – Joint Research Centre (JRC). **Artificial Intelligence and Digital Transformation in Industry** (analytical reports).

Evidence on productivity gains, energy efficiency improvements and AI-enabled optimisation in industrial processes.

OECD. **Digital Economy Outlook** and **Digital Transformation Outlook**.

Comparative analysis of digital adoption, productivity effects and policy frameworks.

OECD. **Artificial Intelligence in Society**.

Conceptual and empirical grounding for AI as a horizontal enabler rather than a standalone sector.

World Bank. **Digital Transformation in the Middle East and North Africa**.

Evidence on ICT sector growth, digital infrastructure investment and adoption patterns in MENA economies.

A5. Clusters, SMEs and ecosystem-based development

European Commission. **SME Performance Review**.

Authoritative source on SME structure, employment shares, internationalisation capacity and cluster participation effects.

European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP).

Programme evidence on cluster-led internationalisation, inter-cluster cooperation and SME participation.

European Commission. **European Strategic Cluster Partnerships for Going International (ESCP-4i)** – evaluations.

Evidence on the effectiveness of cluster-based cooperation compared to standalone business support measures.

European Court of Auditors. **Special Reports on SME Support Instruments**.

Independent assessments of EU support mechanisms and their impact.

A6. Regional value chains, resilience and nearshoring

OECD. **Global Value Chains: Efficiency and Risks and Interconnected Economies.**
Analytical basis for the growing importance of regional value chains and firm resilience.

OECD. **Economic Outlook.**

Macroeconomic analysis linking geopolitical shocks, supply-chain disruptions and regionalisation trends.

European Commission – DG TRADE. **Trade Policy Reviews and Analytical Notes.**

Evidence on EU trade patterns with neighbouring regions and the strategic role of intermediate goods.

A7. Transport, logistics and Mediterranean connectivity

European Commission – DG MOVE. **TEN-T Mediterranean Corridor Work Plans.**
Strategic infrastructure and connectivity priorities across the Mediterranean basin.

European Investment Bank (EIB). **Mediterranean Transport and Infrastructure Reports.**
Evidence on investment needs, bottlenecks and financing priorities.

A8. Financing, development finance and blended finance

European Investment Bank (EIB). **EIB Global / FEMIP Reports.**

Primary source on blended finance, private-sector mobilisation and investment patterns in the Southern Mediterranean.

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). **Regional Economic Prospects.**
Insights into private-sector development, risk profiles and financing conditions.



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OECD. Blended Finance Principles.

Conceptual framework for combining public and private finance in higher-risk, high-impact regions.



Annex B. Methodological note on source usage

B1. Evidence hierarchy

Sources are prioritised according to the following hierarchy:

1. EU primary policy and legal frameworks
2. Official statistics (Eurostat, World Bank)
3. International agencies (IEA, IRENA, OECD)
4. Independent evaluations and analytical reports (ECA, JRC)

B2. Role of sources in the guide

Sources are used to:

- substantiate macroeconomic and demographic framing,
- support claims on energy transition and digitalisation,
- justify cluster-based and ecosystem-oriented approaches,
- provide evidence for SME-centric and pilot-driven strategies.